

The Secret of WILLOWCASTLE

By Lyn Cook



Illustrated by Judith Goodwin

The Secret of WILLOWCASTLE

By Lyn Cook

Illustrated by Judith Goodwin



© Lyn Waddell, 1966; Republished by Camden House Publishing Ltd., 1984

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication, reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system without the prior consent of the Publisher, is an infringement of the copyright law.

ISBN 0-920656-30-7

Trade distribution by Firefly Books, Toronto

Printed in Canada by
RBW Graphics, Owen Sound, for
Camden House Publishing Ltd.
Queen Victoria Road
Camden East, Ontario
K0K 1J0

Cover and illustrations by Judith Goodwin

The song "Jesus Walked the Lonesome Valley" is used by permission of the Boston Music Company, Boston, authorized agent for Carrie Jacobs-Bond publications.

*With love
for my own dear family
Deb, Chris and Robb*

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express gratitude to all those who provided the material that brought to life the pioneer settlement of Napanee; to the Lennox and Addington Historical Society for its work and Papers, and for the invaluable assistance of one of its members, Mrs. Helen Hutchison; to Mr. Alex Macpherson for family mementos and stories; to Dr. Allan Walters, whose historical research inspired details of setting and plot.

The book itself is a special kind of thanks to a friend, Frances Thompson, who began it by telling the author of childhood adventures in her own Willow Castle.



Chapter 1

Becky, I want it done now!" Henrietta's stamp on the study floor rattled the candleholders on her father's desk.

"But, Miss Hen," Becky said, "I've just this room to do. It'll take only a minute and then . . ."

"Don't call me Miss Hen! My name is Miss Henrietta Macpherson. You know Papa will be most angry if you call me nicknames."

"Miss Henrietta, do be good and wait a bit. Why don't you help me a little by dusting your good papa's secretary, and I'll do the chest and the corner cupboard?"

"Oh, very well. You use the cloth; I like this better." Henrietta snatched the small feather duster and whisked it over the desk. "Oh, Beck, truly I can't wait till tomorrow night! You must let down the brown wool to just the right length so that I shall look proper."



Becky sighed. "I do hope the young gentleman's worth all this trouble, I'm sure, miss. The whole household in a turmoil for days on end, the ballroom polished and prettied for refreshments, clothes to let down, clothes to turn up! We couldn't be busier if King William himself was coming to visit."

"John Alex calls Papa a king, Becky, the King of Napanee! John Alex is almost like a king himself, but he's not old enough. When he was here, he spent most of his time with Papa, and there were parties and singing and plays a-plenty up in the ballroom."

"All very nice, I'm sure, miss," Becky said, "but how he earned his bread and butter with all those goings-on, I'll never know."

"Oh, Becky, you know what I mean. There weren't parties all the time. Besides, John Alex worked very hard. Papa said so, and Papa knows about everything."

Becky was scarcely listening. "There, I've finished, Miss Henrietta. Did you make the desk good and shiny? You'll get me into a deal of trouble if you didn't. Your papa is a very fussy man."

"I didn't poke into all those little corners, Beck, if that's what

you mean." Henrietta pointed to the pigeonholes behind the writing surface. "It's too much work for me. You do it."

"It must be done, miss, and if you'll finish, I'll go and find the wool skirt in your wardrobe."

"Oh, fiddle-dee-dee! Give me the old duster again, and please, *please*, Beck, do hurry with the skirt! If the brown one doesn't look nice, Mama said we could fix the blue, my best one." As Becky left, Henrietta poked fiercely at the little holes stuffed with her father's legal papers. With the edge of her skirt, she rubbed vigorously at a red spot of sealing wax on the writing surface. The panel below the pigeonholes slid back noiselessly, disclosing a dark, slim cupboard. A secret place in the desk! She had pressed the edge of the writing surface hard enough to open it. Suddenly, she heard Becky's voice.

"I've found it, miss. Not a trace of moths and as good as new." Becky reentered the room, a long brown wool skirt over her arm. "Look here, miss, I think this will do. It would be a shame to spoil the Sabbath one. Suppose it got caught in somebody's skate?"

"Yes, Beck, it would be a shame." *What was Papa doing with a secret place in his desk?*

"Miss, you do want the skirt turned down, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, Beck, truly I do. Let's go and do it in the kitchen. I love it there!"

"Your papa doesn't want you there, Miss Henrietta, you know that."

"It'll take only a minute, and if we hear him at the door, we'll scurry to my bedroom. Come on, Beck, don't be so *slow!*" She cast no backward glance toward the desk. Exploration would come later, when Becky was well out of sight.

Rachel, plump and grey-haired and older than Becky, was working the butter churn. The soft splash of the milk and butter pads filled the kitchen. Henrietta loved this room — the low oak-beamed ceiling, the dusky gleam of pewter ware on the shelves, the fire leaping on the huge stone hearth where the black cauldron bubbled with a savoury soup. The kitchen had none of the formality of the morning room with its brown brick hearth and cherrywood tables, or the drawing room with the blue velvet chairs. Best of all, Henrietta loved to look out at the river from the broad cedar windowsill. Curled up there, she would listen to Rachel's and Becky's gossip of the settlement or to old Adam's tales of his boyhood in England when he came from his room in

the stable to warm himself by the fire.

Now the room bustled with movement. John Hosey, who helped her father in the store, came blindly through the door, his lean young figure bent with firewood. Tripping over the hooked mat, he would have fallen had Becky not rushed to help him.

"Thank you, Beck. I was carrying a lazy-man's load, I expect. But this fire monster of yours is devouring more than its fair share today."

Rachel moved to the oven set high in the stone beside the hearth. "I can't be expected to bake for two parties without firewood, John." She pointed to the cakes on the table. "Those'll all be gone by tomorrow night when the last skater has left, you mark me well."

"Aye," John sighed. "If I know Master Macdonald and his friends, I believe you. 'Tis a wonder Master Macpherson will put up with all this nonsense, and him such a busy man."

"But John, it's no wonder at all," Henrietta said. "John Alex is a great favourite of Papa's. When he came from Scotland as a small boy with his mama and papa, he stayed with our own Grandfather Macpherson in Kingston. He's kith and kin, as Papa says, at least a half-cousin, and a very clever and able young man."

"Well, it suits me well that he doesn't have a birthday every month," Rachel said. "I don't know what your poor mama would do."

Henrietta said, "Where is she now? Not close by, Rachel?"

"Upstairs in the nursery with Lucy and the babies. Mary has a raspy cough on her chest, and Richard has a rash."

Henrietta fidgeted as Becky adjusted the hem of her skirt. "I'm glad I'm not one or three years old and have such silly things. I wouldn't even want to be five like James or seven like Alexander. When you're five or seven, you know a great deal of nothing."

"Yes, miss, but I'm seventeen, and I don't know much more," Becky said.

"Well, I do, Beck! I've been eleven now for four whole days, and I know a very great deal of everything!"

"That's as it may be," Becky said. "And what about your brother Donald? He's all of fourteen. That must make him a king of knowledge indeed." Henrietta did not see the swift wink Becky gave Rachel.

"Oh, Donald knows a little. He knows how to help Papa in the store and the mill, but he isn't as clever as John Alex. John Alex

will be nineteen tomorrow, and one day, he'll be the mayor of Kingston or some such thing. You just wait and see!"

A horse whinnied outside, and Adam called from the stable door.

"Papa's come!" Henrietta gasped. "Quick, Becky, to my room!"

Thread and pins flew as they ran down the narrow passage past the dining room to the small bedroom beyond the back door. Henrietta heard her father's resonant voice.

"Where's my childie?"

"Here, Papa. Becky has just turned down my skirt for the skating party. Oh, Papa, I can scarcely wait! When will John Alex be here?"

"Very soon now." Papa gave his coat and cap to Becky. "The coach is due within an hour, and Adam is taking the cutter over to the tavern to meet him. Where's Mother?"

"Here I am, Allan." Mistress Macpherson rushed in, her lace cap askew and her shawl dangling. "Wouldn't you know the children would all be sick with the croup and rashes and such like when we're planning a party?"

"There, there, wifie, don't fret yourself so. Leave it all to the help. Rest yourself, and be fresh to meet the guests tonight."

"Rest yourself, he says!" Mistress Macpherson threw up her arms. "Is that not just like a man, Becky? With the cakes to be seen to and the late meal planned and the blue velvet chairs to be brushed up in the drawing room!"

"We'll tend to it all, mistress," Becky said. "Just you go and rest as the master says. Lucy is a wonderful hand with the babies, we all know that."

"Besides, John Alex won't want his friends in the drawing room," Master Macpherson said. "Light a fire in the morning room, and let them gossip in there after the sleighing."

"It isn't proper! A guest is a guest, after all, and it's his birthday! He's a man of some importance now, you know, a rising lawyer in Hallowell, not young John Alex conducting his business on a butter tub in the Ramsay Store." Mama went down the hall complaining.

"Where's Donald, Papa?" asked Henrietta.

"Helping down at the store. I told him to come there after school. Look now, child, there'll be a settler coming up the path

beside the river in a moment or two. Let him in and show him to my study. He's wanting to clear the deed to his land."

Henrietta heard the knock as soon as it came. The man who entered was tall and thin, his face marked with hunger. "My papa awaits you in his study, sir," she said. "Follow me, please."

When the door was closed, she pictured the two men sitting across the desk from one another. It was this way in the study more times than not. Little wonder John Alex called her father the King of Napanee. The village would be nothing without him. As Crown Lands Agent, he was in charge of deeding new land to settlers of the wilderness round about. As Justice of the Peace, he dealt with the law and all those who broke it by theft or violation of rights. The gristmill and the sawmill below the falls both belonged to him, as did the thriving store on Dundas Street whose dark depths she loved to explore on the rare occasions she was allowed to visit. Even the school and the land it stood on were his gifts to the village of Napanee.

"I wish he'd left well enough alone," Donald had once said. "I might be his partner in the mill or the store now, if he hadn't built the school and forced me to attend it."

Still, Henrietta thought, I wish I could go there instead of to the young ladies' school in Clarkville across the river. It was all right when John Alex was there. He used to wave at me from the Ramsay Store every morning when Adam took me past in the sleigh or the wagon. Now there is nothing to look forward to but Mistress Dier's nagging voice. Donald brought from his school such fine tales of notes slipped from hand to hand under the desks, of pranks played on the unsuspecting young schoolmaster. But no, Papa said she must learn to be a young lady, and Mistress Dier's school it must be. There was no sense trying to play pranks on Mistress Dier. She saw everything!

Suddenly the study door opened, and Papa was shouting up the stairs. "Mother! Rachel! Becky! Bring clothing from the trunk and bread from the kitchen! Here's a man with a family to feed and clothe and precious little to do it with till spring."

Mistress Macpherson's distraught face appeared over the bannisters. "But, husband, how can we spare bread? There's a party tonight and another tomorrow. Clothes, yes, but not bread!"

"We've never yet had to let our guests go hungry, Mother. Come

along now, the good Lord would have us share our plenty with another's want."

The sack on the settler's back was laden with food and clothing as the door closed behind him, and Master Macpherson was bidding him return in the early spring for a gift of seed grain toward his first planting.

"I don't know what's to do," Mistress Macpherson wailed. "Rachel, Becky, fall to at the baking and make some sweet rolls. There must be enough to go round. If only these poor unfortunate people didn't happen along when we have to tend to a party!"

Henrietta ran down the long hall to the front door that opened on the river.

"Papa! Mama! It's Adam back already, and John Alex is with him! It's John Alex, don't you see?"

The tall, slender young man with the dark curly hair and the long, rather homely face leaped from the cutter as Henrietta ran to greet him. He swung her high in the air.

"Heigh ho! How's my Henry?"

"John Alex, put me down at once! I'm eleven now and too big for such things."

"Not too big for a gift, I hope." With a formal bow, John Alex handed her a small oblong box wrapped in gold paper. His eyes twinkled.

"Oh, Papa, Mama, look here! John Alex has brought me a present! For my birthday? Is that what it's for, John Alex?"

"It is, although it's a little late. I've been on the new canal to Bytown and back, and I bought it there."

"May I open it now, Papa? Please?"

"Not until John Alex has had tea." Papa welcomed him with a handshake. "And how are all the affairs in Hallowell town, John Alex?"

"Your brother Lowther is still in a bad state with his cough, and I'm taking the load of the business." John Alex turned aside from the drawing room. "Cousin Mary, couldn't we take tea in the morning room? You know how much I like it there."

Henrietta was not listening. "Papa, please let me open my present now? I *will* open it! It's mine, after all."

"Henrietta!"

She straightened swiftly. When Papa spoke like that, nobody disobeyed.

"You will give me the gift, and I shall keep it until I see you behaving in a manner to deserve it. Go and sit quietly under the clock in the morning room, and say not a word until I give you permission."

"Yes, Papa." Slipping to the arrow-back chair beside the grandfather clock, she stared at the blazing fire Becky had set on the hearth, ashamed that her father had scolded her in front of John Alex as if she were a small child. Papa should have allowed her to open the present at once. It was hers, after all, and had nothing to do with him. Whatever could it be? John Alex had given her only one other thing, a seal that he had used on his legal documents in the Ramsay Store. Papa had had it made into a small bronze brooch for her down at the smithy. "To remember John Alex by," Papa had said, "when he rises in the world."

"I thought of you, Henry, when I saw it, and wished you could have come with me."

She looked up, startled. John Alex had been speaking, and she had not heard.

Her father nodded toward her. "You may join in the talk now, Henrietta. We shall see about the gift later."

"I was telling your papa about my trip down the new Rideau Canal, Henry. It's the new water channel between Bytown and Kingston."

"Why was it built, John Alex?" She was still thinking of the golden parcel, but Papa liked her to ask sensible questions.

"In order that steamboats can come from Montreal to Kingston and bypass the rapids on the St. Lawrence River. It'll be used for the transport of military supplies and troops in times of danger or war, and it gives Lake Ontario a doorway to the sea." John Alex rose as Mistress Macpherson entered, followed by Becky with the tea tray. "Your home is as charming as ever, Cousin Mary. How are all the babies?"

"Every one of them with an ailment, John Alex. You'll please excuse me while I go and fetch the spikenard from the pantry so that Rachel may make some syrup for the coughs." She was gone in a flurry.

"Please tell me more about the canal, John Alex," Henrietta said primly while Becky poured the tea.

"It passes like a silver chain through the lakes and rivers in the wilderness, Henry, linking them all together. Great stands of timber, unexplored forests and raging rivers are on all sides." He turned to Master Macpherson and spoke quietly. "And all along the way, Allan, the sun shines on the gravestones of those who lost their lives building it."

"It takes courage and lives to open the doors of a new country," Papa said. Then he spoke to Henrietta. "Would you care to look into your gift now, lass?"

"Oh, Papa, I would indeed!" She waited. Becky brought it to her and went back to the kitchen.

She tore at the wrappings. Astonishingly, her own small face in the midst of brown curls gazed up at her. It was a mirror! But not just an ordinary mirror like Mama's, surmounted in gold or silver. The glass was set in a wooden frame and the wood itself carved into the turrets, balconies and hooded windows of a castle!

"John Alex, it's beautiful! Never have I had such a present as this! I do thank you with all my heart!"

John Alex smiled. "You told me yourself you were growing up, and I know young ladies like to primp before a mirror."

Master Macpherson spoke decisively. "Time enough for that, John Alex. 'Tis a beautiful gift, but I think it wise to put it away for the child until she has learned to be less of a willful hoyden and more of a responsible young lady."

Henrietta stared at him. "Papa, you wouldn't take it away! Not my birthday present! John Alex brought it all the way from Bytown. Just for me."

"I know that, and John Alex will understand from the display he's seen here today. He and I have frequent dealings with people who think too much of themselves, and we don't want you to be one of them, admiring yourself before a mirror. Is that not right, John Alex?"

Henrietta's eyes pleaded with John Alex.

He gazed at her solemnly. "I know what your papa means, Henry. Do be a good girl, and in time, he'll let you use the mirror. It will be as useful then as it is now. Perhaps it was too old a gift for you after all. Whatever happens, you must do as your father

says. He is a very wise man and knows what is best for you."

"He knows nothing at all! It is my mirror, and I should have it! What harm can come of it? It is *my* mirror I tell you, and I want it to touch and look into."

Papa rose without a word. Conscious of the sadness in John Alex's eyes as she passed, Henrietta fled to her room, leaving the mirror on the chair, and flung herself beneath the canopy on the bed. Little wonder they called her father the King of Napanee. Orders, orders, orders! But why had she spoken so hastily? She might have known Papa would be displeased. She wiped her tears quickly on her skirt as the door opened.

It was Becky. "Oh, miss, you have got yourself into a deal of trouble, haven't you?"

Henrietta turned away.

"I don't like to have to tell you this, miss, but your papa says you're to stay in your room tonight, and you won't be allowed to go to the skating party tomorrow night, even for half an hour."

"Not go to the skating party!" Henrietta rose. "But I have to go! This is my first time, and John Alex was going to skate with me. Becky, I just have to!"

Becky shook her head. "I'm sorry, miss. Those was my orders. I'm to watch over you here and see that you stay. Your father was most angry and your mother almost in tears. I must say, miss, you might have watched your tongue on such a day. All that sewing on the brown skirt for nothing!"

"But it won't be for nothing. John Alex will talk Papa into changing his mind. I know he will, Becky!"

"He's already tried, Miss Henrietta. I do think your John Alex is a fine young man, so gracious and kind to Rachel and me, even if he is a mite ugly with that long face and nose. Handsome is as handsome does, as my mother says, God keep her."

"Oh, Becky, do keep quiet and let me think! There must be a way out. Ask Papa if he will see me. He'll let me go. I know he will. He always gives in to me in the end."

"I'm sorry, miss. He said he wouldn't see you till church on Sunday, and then you was to bend your knee and ask the good Lord's forgiveness for your willful ways. And now, I must set about helping Rachel with the supper." Becky moved toward the door. "Don't you leave, now, or there'll be worse to come."

Henrietta stared at the closing door. It was not possible. John Alex in the house, and she could not laugh and talk with him. The sleighing party tonight, and she could not watch the young people set off laughing and singing over the snow. The skating party tomorrow night, her very first, and she was not allowed to go. And she had dreamed of it for months, ever since Papa had suggested it to Mama! She flung herself on the bed and burst into tears. She hated them all, Papa and Mama, Becky and Rachel, Donald, who was allowed to make up his own mind about things, all of them! All except John Alex. He would help her if he could, she knew that. But there was nothing he could do. She could not bear to miss the skating, the fires on the bank lighting the long lovely stretch of the river and the guests singing as they swung down the ice in pairs. She could have been a real young lady like the rest of them, with John Alex skating by her side.

Thoughts of the mirror set her crying again. If only there were some secret place she could hide from them all! She thought of the castle on the frame, picturing the winding staircases and secret passageways. She sat up suddenly. The secret place in the desk! She had almost forgotten it! With all the family at the evening meal, now would be the time to explore. Opening the door, she jumped back at a burst of laughter from the dining room on the far side of the house. Quietly she slipped down the hall to her father's study, now in the darkness of a winter evening. She did not dare light a candle. But she knew the room as well as her own. She groped for the desk. The writing surface was down, which meant Papa had been working upon it. She slid her fingers along the polished wood and pressed hard. Noiselessly the panel glided open. Running her fingers carefully along the edge, she felt about in the darkness. There was a piece of paper against the far wall of the compartment! Quickly she stuffed it in her blouse pocket. As her hands searched the desk to find the release for the panel, they met something hard on the shelf. The mirror! *I could take it now, she thought, and enjoy it in my room when no one is there. I could bring it back and put it away before Papa knows.* Her hand lingered on the smooth wood. Then quietly she closed the panel and went back to her room, leaving the gift in its place.

She could not wait to uncrumple the note from the pocket. Was

it a secret message? Her hand trembled with excitement as she held it toward the candlelight.

October 28, 1822

Your kindness in waiting for payment has meant the difference between life and death for my family. If there is any way in future in which I can be of service to yours, do not hesitate to call upon

*Your servant, sir,
Luke Carscallion.*

How disappointing! A secret message would have made everything all right. But this was only a note from the Carscallion family down the river. Her father had undoubtedly given young Master Luke seed grain, or even food supplies from the store, and refused payment until Master Luke was able to make it from a good harvest. This note had probably slipped down the crack in the desk from the bill compartment and been forgotten long ago. She knew the Carscallions by sight. They lived on a farm past the mills and the bridge. Old Lukey had come to Napanee in the early days of settlement, and there was some story about his having been hunted by soldiers in the United States. Sometimes when she went with Papa on business down the river, they passed the long, low farmhouse that sat below the limestone ledge on the other side of Campbell's Rocks. Carscallions had a big house, but it was not as fine as Squire Campbell's. Everybody said the two finest houses in Napanee belonged to the Macphersons and the Campbells, she knew that, and she was proud of it. The Carscallions' sprawling, Dutch-style farmhouse was always half hidden by haystacks and piles of straw, and she had seen children playing among them, probably Old Lukey's grandchildren. At any rate, this note was of no interest to her. She would return it to its hiding place in the desk as soon as she could.

The door opened suddenly, and Becky came in with a tray. "I don't wish any dinner, thank you," Henrietta said.

"Miss Henrietta, you'll be starving before the night's out! Look here, it's roast beef and apple pudding, special for Master Macdonald."

"No, thank you. Take it away." She would show them. They could not make her eat.

Becky hesitated, then left the room, taking the tray with her. The aroma of the beef was almost more than Henrietta could bear.

At eight, she was still alone with the candlelight. Laughter and shouting rose in the yard beyond her window as Papa returned with the sleigh full of young people he had picked up in the village. She opened her curtain and peeked out. Tom Ramsay and Donald Stuart were pulling John Alex onto the hay-covered sleigh into the midst of a dozen young men and women. Lucinda Peppler was there, her blonde curls poking out from her winter bonnet. Donald had told her once about Lucinda slapping John Alex because he had offered her the wrong arm coming home from a party. How dare she be so quick-tempered! And with John Alex above all! Henrietta had never liked her from that day, although her face was sweet enough. All at once, Papa snapped his whip, the sleigh bells rang merrily, and with a shout, they were off, leaving the fields and forest behind them silent with the winter darkness.

"Miss Henrietta, are you asleep?" Becky was at the door.

"No, I shan't go to sleep tonight."

"Miss, Master Macdonald sent you a little something."

"Something?"

"A sweet roll from his plate. He thought you might be hungry. He shouldn't have done it, miss. You had a chance at your dinner."

Suddenly, she flung herself at Becky. "Oh, Beck, I thank you for bringing it to me. What did I tell you? Is John Alex not the dearest person we know?"

"Yes, miss, I believe you. He is gentle and kind, I can see that."

"Maybe I was a little willful, Becky, but Papa had no need to be so mean to me. I think I am a little sorry."

"Much good it will do you, miss. You know your papa. He stands by his word."

Henrietta sighed. "I know. But what's mine is mine, Beck, and I have a right to it. Nobody else has."

"You'll have to mend your ways, miss, if you expect to see that mirror again. Come now, let me help you to undress and tuck you in. Tomorrow will come soon enough, and perhaps it will bring an understanding."

When Becky had gone, she lay beneath the canopy of the bed eyeing the heavy folds by the snow-light coming in at the window. The folds became the long corridors and winding staircases of a strange wooden castle. Sometime in the night, the castle heralds shouted all around her, and the troubadours sang songs. She awoke with a start and listened. John Alex and his friends were singing in the ballroom above her bedroom. Everything would be all right tomorrow. Papa would forgive her, and John Alex had come home. She turned on her pillow and slept.



Chapter 2

She awakened in the morning to the sound of Adam at the well drawing water for the horses. Becky had not yet arrived to light the fire on the hearth, and her breath hung frostily in the winter air of the bedroom. Turning back the heavy folds of the bed drapes, she fumbled in the dusky light of morning for her blue shawl. She was starving! She tiptoed down the long passage between morning room and dining room. Adam had already set the kitchen fire ablaze, and the flames leaped and crackled in the silence. Beside the hearth, skillets and ladles and the glossy wood of the firkins that contained flour and meal for cooking glowed in the light. She made straightway for the storeroom, colliding in the dark with a flitch of bacon and a barrel of molasses. But she found what she was looking for — yesterday's loaves still fresh and sweet in the pine box. Quickly she tore a piece from a round end. "There's been mice in my storeroom again,"



Rachel would say. "We'd best set a trap." Footsteps sounded on the stairs to the attic where the servants slept, and Henrietta fled back to her room.

"Miss Henrietta, are you awake?" Becky was at her door. She swallowed the bread with a gulp. "Yes, Beck, and it's cold in here."

"I'll light the fire, miss. It won't take a minute."

Henrietta scraped at the thick layer of frost on the windowpane and peered out. "Oh, Becky, the sun is coming up all ablaze, and the sky is as bright as a copper kettle. What a wonderful day for a skating party!"

"Don't count on it, miss. You know what your papa said, and he did seem so angry. I wouldn't ask him again, if I was you." Becky tried to work up a flame with the bellows from the kitchen.

"Oh, Becky, you ask him for me. Please, Beck!" She flung her arms around her. "You know how much it means to me with John Alex here."

"Do be careful, miss. You'll have me pitched in the fire!" But

Becky softened at the repeated hugs. "Oh, very well, miss, I'll put in a word for you, but I don't expect it'll do much good. Your papa's really upset with you this time."

"Beck, you are a sweet one, and I love you with all my heart."

"Never mind that now, miss. I'll help you dress and bring your breakfast, and then we'll see what can be done."

While Becky combed her long curls, she thought of the be-castled mirror and longed to see it again. But one thing at a time, and the skating party was, for the moment, the most important. As she waited for her breakfast, there was a heavy step in the hall. She flew to the door.

"Oh, Donald, it's only you. I was sure it was Papa."

Her brother, tall and long-faced like his mother, ambled into the room. "Hey there, Hen, I understand you've been really naughty this time. What's up between you and Papa?"

"Oh, it was nothing but a silly fit of temper. John Alcx brought me a lovely mirror for my birthday, and I did so want it. And Papa made me put it away until I'm older. It isn't fair, truly it isn't, Donald, and I told him so."

Donald grinned in the firelight. "You've cooked your goose this time, lassie. I heard him telling Mama your behaviour is becoming insufferable, or some such word as that, and this time you're to see the whole punishment through." He pulled one of her long curls. "Cheer up, sis, there's more things a-brewing. I heard a whisper of them in the store yesterday when Squire Briggs came in to talk to Papa. Something about a big fair to be held on the grounds right across the river from our house."

"A fair!" Henrietta's eyes danced. She remembered jugglers, dancers and animal acts that sometimes came to the tavern yard for the entertainment of the villagers. "What kind of fair?"

"Bless me if I know, sis," Donald said, "but we'll be hearing more about it if Papa's hand is in it. I have to go down to the mill with Papa this morning, Hen, so I'll be off. And do keep a rein on that tongue of yours, or you'll find yourself missing the fair too."

When Becky arrived with the breakfast tray a few moments later, Henrietta attacked the fried pork and wheat cakes ravenously. She gazed at Becky, a question in her wide brown eyes.

"Yes, miss, I dared to stop him in the hall before he went to the

morning room for breakfast." She shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid it's no good, miss. No skating party, and you're to stay in your room all day. It really is a punishment this time, miss."

"I can't even speak to John Alex while he's here, or even see him?"

"No, miss. Your papa says you must learn to mind your manners and respect your elders, and this is a way to help you remember," Becky said. "He's taking Master Macdonald about in the cutter to see some of his old friends across the river in Clarkville this afternoon. There's been nothing but talk of law and politics at the breakfast table. Your poor mama gets in only a word now and then to complain about the babies and the draughts in the nursery."

"What are Jamie and Alexander going to do?"

"They're having breakfast in the nursery, and then they're going out to make a fort in the snow beside the stable. Adam has promised to help them when his work with the horses is finished."

"Oh, Beck, a fort would have been such fun! And I have to sit here and do nothing."

"Not quite nothing, miss. Your mama will be here soon with something to keep your hands busy."

Henrietta knew what it was at once. When her mother came to the door an hour later, her face was sullen.

"Mama, I won't do another old sampler, I just won't."

Mistress Macpherson laid the coarse canvas cloth and skeins of thread on the low table before the fire. "Your papa says you yourself must choose a verse from the Holy Scriptures that you think most fitting." She passed a weary hand across her forehead. "And oh, for goodness' sakes, do it without fuss, Henrietta. Lucy and I have been up half the night with Mary and Richard, and I feel I can take no more. Sometimes I do believe you're no daughter of mine, the headstrong way you act and speak."

Henrietta felt a sudden pity for her mother, caught up in the turmoil of a household with so many little ones to care for. She could never remember a time when her mother's eyes did not mirror concern — if not for her own growing family, then for that of some neighbour or settler.

"Mama, did you never want something very badly when you lived as a little girl on the big farm at Hay Bay?" she asked.

"I expect I wanted many things," her mother sighed, "but I knew better than to ask for them. In my day, children were seen and not heard. But there are times when I wish I were back there again with my dear mama and papa, God rest his soul."

She looked so sad as she brushed a wisp of grey hair from her face and stared into the flames that Henrietta went to her slowly and took her hand. There were few signs of affection between her mother and herself. She often sat on Papa's knee and gave him a wild hug of appreciation for some kindness, but with Mama, the kisses were cold and dutiful, and the hugs almost unknown. Perhaps it was because Mama had so many babies to care for that she did not have enough love to go around.

"Mama, I'll be good," she said. "I promise. And I hope the babies are soon better so that you may get your proper rest."

"There's a good girl." Mama bent to plant a quick awkward kiss on top of her head and was gone down the hall, skirts flying.

Henrietta fetched her Bible from the mantel. Perhaps if she worked hard at the sampler, there might still be a chance at the skating party. She had no idea what to choose from the hundreds of pages before her. Then she recalled the sermon the Reverend Saltern Givens had delivered in the schoolhouse two weeks ago — something about a son who had gone astray and found evil companions, and his return to a forgiving father. She leafed through the thin pages. When she found the verse, she felt triumphant. *I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. And I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.*

That was perfect. Since Papa had congratulated the preacher on his sermon, he would surely admire her choice. With careful stitching, she marked the passage on her cloth in dark blue thread. *Saint Luke Fifteen, Verses Eighteen and Nineteen.*

She worked by the light of the fire until she heard the boys shouting outside. Then she moved to the window, her stitches becoming more ragged as she lifted her eyes from the sewing to watch the fun at the fort. Jamie, plump and roly-poly, kept falling down in the snow, and Henrietta laughed, in spite of her loneliness, to see him. Sturdy Alexander would pick him up, brush him off and set to work again on the hole in the snow. Henrietta almost forgot the time as she stitched and watched, dreaming of the mirror, of

the skating party and even of the secret place in the desk. What could she hide in the secret panel? A message, perhaps? But what was the good of hiding a message if there was no one to pick it up? The boys were too young for such doings and Donald not young enough. It seemed a shame not to have a real friend. Fanny Briggs was all right for sharing whispers at school, but too proper altogether for mischief or adventure.

She turned as Becky entered the room. "Oh, Becky, what time is it? Is Papa back from the mill yet? Is John Alex up and about? How much longer shall I have to sit here?"

"Your papa has just come in and is taking his lunch. I'm to fetch your work to show him." She examined the sampler. "You've got a lot done, miss. He will be pleased."

"Oh, I do hope so, Becky! Do you think there's any chance . . . ?"

"Now I don't know, I'm sure, Miss Henrietta. Don't count on it too much. I'll be back in a whistle."

Henrietta walked about the room restlessly. She saw Donald in the yard urging her two young brothers in for the noon meal and Adam bridling the old horse Mapes for the cutter. Mapes was good company for Adam, for he, too, was very old. He had been used to carry mail on the Kingston Road before the coach took over, and when his day was done, Papa had bought him for the easy task of drawing the cutter about the village. When Papa wanted to drive about the village well turned out, he used Meg and Bonnie Prince in harness. They were young and quite beautiful, their bodies sleek with Adam's grooming.

Becky came in, smiling. "Well, miss, there's been a little change of heart."

"He's given in! I can go to the party!"

"No, miss, not quite that."

"I can have the mirror, then. That must be it. Oh, Beck, fetch it this very minute!"

Becky set the lunch tray on the table. "Miss Henrietta, your papa says because of the fine text you chose and your diligent work upon it, he will allow you to go up to his bedroom this evening and watch the skating party from there."

"Is that all? Just to watch?" That, then, was the end of the matter. As Becky left, Henrietta flung herself across the bed and

buried her face in the pillow.

An hour later, she moved to the table and ate the pork, potatoes and beans. After all, to watch the skating was better than nothing. The view from her parents' bedroom window would be splendid. The entire area of ice that Donald and old Adam had cleared was directly below the window, and although the river wound around small hills to the north and south, she would not miss much. Then there was still the mirror and the secret place. Perhaps if she worked well on the sampler in the afternoon, Papa would let her have the mirror. How fine it would look standing on her butter-nut chest of drawers, the fire gleaming on the mysterious turrets! She really longed to see it again. What harm would there be if she went to fetch it and kept it in her room for a few days? Papa would never know it was gone, his desk was so jumbled with papers. Maybe in time, he might even forget all about it, and she could enjoy it in secret for months to come!

After the faraway clatter of lunch and dishes, silence had enfolded the house. The babies would be napping, Mama and Lucy with them. Or perhaps Mama would be in the kitchen with Rachel, planning the party refreshments. And Papa had taken John Alex to see his old friends. The thought of her cousin gave her a sudden twinge. She could almost see his wise kind eyes looking down at her without their accustomed twinkle. *Tosh!* she thought. *John Alex wouldn't really care if I took it. After all, he gave it to me to enjoy.* She slipped down the hall to her father's study. With the morning sun gone from the back of the house, the room was dark. The flat writing surface of the desk held a sheet of paper on which her father had been writing.

Napanee Fair

This is to inform all interested parties in the vicinity that the Society for the study of good Agricultural methods in our county has decided that a fair

The writing ended there. This must be the very fair Donald had spoken about. When she was forgiven, she would ask Papa about it, but now she must find the mirror. It was not where it had been when she had explored the secret place, but when she moved the books and papers from the shelf above the pigeonholes, she saw it lying back against the wall. She left everything as she found it,

but could not resist opening the sliding panel. Impulsively she picked up the quill pen and scrawled on a scrap of paper: *Dear Secret Friend: I have taken the castle-mirror for a while and only you shall know. Your friend in mystery, H.M.* She pushed the note into the dark recess, closed it quickly and crept back to her room.

The mirror was even more beautiful than before. What if she could climb the winding stairs in Mama's white brocaded ball gown, or stand at the tower window and flutter a kerchief to welcome her armoured knight home from battle? She might even ring the tiny bell carved above the elegant doorway in time of danger or celebration. It was truly the most precious thing she had ever owned.

In the corner of her room was an old maple chest that had come with her mother from Hay Bay. In it were stored the summer clothes that would not see sunshine again until April or May. Beneath them was an excellent hiding place for the mirror. She contented herself with gazing at the carving for a moment only, then hastily hid it away and returned to her sampler.

Recky came to fetch her at half past seven. Once in her parents' room, seated on the red damask chair before the window, she forgot everything except her longing to be one of the skaters. They began to arrive at eight, moving by twos and threes around the great fires Adam and Donald had lit on the riverbank. The night was perfect for skating, the moon rising over the limestone ridge and the sky ablaze with stars. She searched for John Alex in the groups of gay young people but could see him nowhere. He would be gone tomorrow, and she had spoken scarcely a word to him since he arrived.

At the knock on the bedroom door, she leaped up, startled. "Come in, please!" When John Alex entered the room, she ran to meet him. "But I thought you'd be down with the guests!"

"Your father said I might come to see you for a few moments, little cousin. How is it going?"

"Oh, John Alex, I thought the day would never be over, but it is now, and I can see everything from the window." She stared at the plate in his hand. "What did you bring?"

"Some little cakes. I begged them from Rachel. I promised I would eat four less at the party after the skating. I truly don't think she believed me." He sat down on the blanket chest. "No skating

at all for you?"

"None at all," Henrietta said. "I do think it's mean, don't you?"

"Sad, at any rate," John Alex said. "But this growing up is sometimes a rather sad business."

"You can't know much about that," Henrietta said. "I daresay no one ever took a mirror away from you." The mere thought of it made her smile. "Or kept you from a skating party either, for that matter."

"No, but there were other things. I remember a time when I was nine years old and my father kept the old red store near the church at Hay Bay. There was a knife I very much wanted, displayed on his counter. He promised it to me for the spring when I could use it to cut willow switches and make a whistle." John Alex moved to the window and looked out into the darkness. "Henrietta, I wanted that knife more than all else. It was beautiful to my young eyes — strong, large and heavily bladed."

"But your father promised it to you. What happened?" Henrietta asked.

"One afternoon, my mother asked me to keep the fire on the hearth while she went to tend a sick neighbour. She had a ham cooking for supper. But I was building a blockhouse with the wood in the woodshed and forgot entirely about the fire." John Alex smiled ruefully. "When Mama came home, the fire was out and there was no ham for supper."

"Oh, well, there would be other things surely, salt pork in the cellar, or a bean dish," Henrietta said.

"That wasn't the way my father looked upon it. He said if I was not old enough to tend to my responsibilities, I was not old enough to have such a dangerous weapon as a knife."

"And he never gave it to you, not when you wanted it so very much?"

"He never gave it to me, but I took it," John Alex said.

"You took it!" Only too clearly, Henrietta saw the mirror beneath the petticoat in the maple chest.

"Yes, and I proceeded to cut my finger off, very nearly, when I used it down by the river. I suppose my guilty conscience gave me an unsteady hand," John Alex said. "It mattered not to my father that I was wailing from the hurt. He gave me a sound thrashing out behind the shed just the same."

"Still, that's not much like me," Henrietta said. "A mirror isn't the same as a knife."

"Perhaps not, but it does prove that one sorry thing leads to another, and in the end, I think fathers know what is good and true for their families. Your papa is a very wise man, Henry." John Alex's eyes were wise and kind, too, as they smiled on her. She turned away. What sorry thing would the hidden mirror lead to? If only she had not taken it! What would John Alex think of her if he knew? It was, after all, the same as the knife. Papa would call it stealing, she had no doubt of it. She hadn't wanted to think of that when she took it to her room.

"They're waiting for me down there," John Alex was saying. "I must find my skates in the kitchen. Don't fret, little cousin. We'll skate together next time."

He was gone before she could say thank you for the cakes. Pressing her nose against the cold pane, she watched him come out of the front door and make his way to the river. A great shout went up from the guests, and they all flocked around him. Presently the group separated, and skates began to skim the ice. But she could not fasten her mind on the skating. She listened. There was no sound in the hall below the stairs. Mama, Rachel and Becky were very likely setting the tables for the refreshments. But to go downstairs, she must pass the ballroom door. She must chance it! The mirror must be put back in its rightful place, and now!

She whirled down the steps like a windstorm and into the darkness of her own room. Knowing its contents, she had no trouble finding the chest and the mirror at the bottom. Papa's study was another matter. After she had fallen over the foot warmer and sent the chair sliding, she opened the curtains at the window to let in the moonlight. In a moment, the mirror was returned to its hiding place. As she went to the window to close the curtains, she stared out in amazement. Two figures shadowed the snow just beyond the huge clump of the briar rose bush! They were watching something. What was it? Her cheek against the window, she tried to peer toward the front of the house. They were gazing at the skaters, that's what it was! Whoever could they be? She was sure she had seen the boy around the old Carscallion place when she had driven past with her father in summer. He was one of Old Lukey's

grandsons, most likely. But the other was a girl, younger than herself, with a tangle of black hair tumbling from an old battered bonnet and a pale pinched little face. She wore only a thin shawl over her patched dress. As a sudden gust of wind whipped around the corner of the house, she shivered violently and drew closer to the boy.

Henrietta wanted to rush out, fling a warm quilt about the thin body and bring her in to her own blazing hearth. But how could she do that? She was not supposed to be in Papa's study at all. Henrietta saw the child on the snow smile with delight as the sound of singing drifted up from the river. She must get back upstairs, but how could she bear to leave the child outside? What if she should never see her again? She must know who she was and where she had come from. She heard the door open in the kitchen and Papa shouting, "Adam, are you in here? We need more wood for the fires!" She drew the curtains hastily and fled up the steps.

As she closed the bedroom door, she saw the cakes, still on the blanket chest where John Alex had left them. The very thing. She would give them to the child with the thin face. But how would she get them to her? As if in answer to her question, Becky came rushing out of the ballroom. Before she could hurry down the stairs, her arms laden with trays, Henrietta called to her.

"Oh, miss, I haven't a single minute right now. Wouldn't it do later?"

"No, Becky, you must come now. It's most important." She pulled her into the room and closed the door. "Becky, there's someone standing outside behind the briar rose. I want you to take these cakes down and give them to her. At once, Beck!"

"What, miss? Whatever are you talking about?" Becky looked bewildered.

"Becky, don't wait for questions. Let the boy have one if he wishes, but give three to the girl. Please, Becky, hurry! Behind the briar rose." She gave Becky a push that sent her flying through the doorway. Becky went down the stairs in a flurry and disappeared.

In a few minutes, she was back, climbing the stairs with weary resignation. "Oh, Miss Henrietta, it is unfair of you to send me on a wild-goose chase when I'm so busy with the party. Couldn't you save your pranks for another time?"

"You mean there was no one there?"

"Not a soul, miss. All this being alone is giving you bad dreams. I must speak to your papa about it."

"But I saw them, Becky! With my own two eyes I saw them!" She almost wept with disappointment. She had wanted the girl to have the cakes so much.

"How could you see them, miss, if you was up here?"

Henrietta bit her lip. "Becky, I went downstairs for a minute. It was just for a minute, Beck, and for a good thing. You must believe me and not tell a soul. Please, Beck?"

"I won't tell, miss. But I saw no one outside. It's colder than a stepmother's breath out there tonight, but no strangers by the briar rose."

"They must have seen me at the window and run away," Henrietta said slowly. "Becky, is there a Carscallion about the age of Donald?"

"Yes, of course, miss. You know him. It's James, like your little brother, and he goes to school across the way."

"Are there any girls in the Carscallion family?"

"None that I know of, miss," Becky said. "All grandsons. I don't know too much about them, mind you. They're away down the river, and they keeps to themselves a good deal."

"Beck, are there any new settlers in the village or along the river?"

"I've never seen any on my trips home, Miss Henrietta. January is no time for settling, miss. If they was coming, they'd wait till spring." She turned to go. "Look, miss, I must go and finish my chores. There's bread and meat and cakes a-plenty to bring up for the young folks. After the cold air and the exercise, they'll be ready to eat the sill off the front door!" Becky moved to the door. "I'll light the candle in your room, miss. You'll be going to bed soon."

Henrietta turned back to the window, but she only half saw the swirl of movement below in the light of fire and moon. The thin pinched face with the mop of black hair crowning it kept coming in between. She stared down the river, hoping for a glimpse of the two figures, but there was nothing but snow and the limestone ridge smudged with pines. Perhaps, after all, the girl had been a dream, a vision of moonbeams and shadows and the tangled branches of the yellow briar rose.



Chapter 3

On Sunday morning, she was up and dressed before Rachel or Becky were astir to light the fires. Flinging her cloak about her shoulders, she crept out in the dusky light of early morning to the briar rose bush. "I knew it," she said aloud. "Footsteps in the snow. There was somebody here last night!"

"Did you see them too, Miss Henrietta?" Adam spoke in a low voice behind her.

She wheeled, startled. "Oh, Adam, I didn't know you were up and about."

"I'm going in to light the fire on the kitchen hearth, miss, and to fetch the water. I was wonderin' if you saw the two of them last night, the way you spoke."

"I saw them, Adam, but they went so quickly, I thought it had

all been a dream.” She leaned close to him. “Who were they, do you know?”

“The boy was one of the Carscallions, but who the girl was I hadn’t a notion. She looked like a wild little thing, and I had a mind to tell the master they was prowling about. He wouldn’t want them here, especially Carscallions. He and Old Lukey’s son don’t see eye to eye in politics.”

“Oh, Adam, don’t tell Papa anything about them, please! You mustn’t breathe a word!”

“Very well, miss,” Adam said. “I won’t if you say so. But still, they oughtn’t to be about here.”

“They won’t come again, Adam, I’m sure of it. They came to watch the skating. The whole village knew we were having a party for John Alex. Maybe the Carscallions never have a skating party.” The girl had watched with such delight on her face, one would say she had never seen skating before. Henrietta laid a cold hand on Adam’s arm. “You do promise not to tell Papa, don’t you, Adam? I’ll have Rachel make some of your favourite corn-bread for supper if you keep it a secret. Forever, I mean.”

“There’s no need to bribe me, miss. If I say I won’t tell, I won’t. But it’s a mystery to me why you want it that way.” His old face crinkled in a smile. “But then, there’s no tellin’ why young ladies wants most things, as I says to Beck and Rachel when they’re at me about this and that.” Still talking, he lumbered away through the snow to the stables.

Later, she was seated next to Mama and Donald in the school-house that served as a church for the Anglican congregation. Papa, all eyes upon him, strode in and took his place beside her. As he had promised, church was their first meeting place since her misconduct. “Good morning, childie.” He patted her gloved hand, and she knew she was forgiven.

“John Alex is singing in the choir just as he used to,” she whispered to Donald. Mama frowned her to silence as the choir filed in and took their places about the schoolmaster’s desk.

Later, there was laughter and pleasant conversation at the noon meal in the dining room, but never a mention of the mirror with the castle frame. With the babies improving, Mama was once again a smiling hostess.

“John Alex,” she said, “with your fortunes rising and an election

coming with the summer, have you a political career in mind?"

"It's a little early for deciding that, ma'am," he smiled. "They keep me too busy for politics in Hallowell. I've been made secretary to the Young Men's Society and to the School Board, and these, together with my law practice, have me quite busy enough."

"Keep it in mind, nevertheless," Master Macpherson advised. "With so much reform talk against the government, we need young and steady hands to guide us. I understand that scoundrel Mackenzie plans to run for the mayor's chair in York. If he wins it, it'll be a sorry day for us."

"Why, Papa?" Henrietta asked.

Her father's round ruddy face wore a look of surprise. "'Tis not usual for young ladies of eleven to be interested in politics, childie, but if you want to know, I'll tell you. Mr. William Mackenzie sees nothing but evil in our present government. He pictures those of us who support it as thieves and scoundrels, taking from the poor to give to the rich. He says we give the best of the land to the church we belong to, keeping the reins of power in the hands of a select few." His voice rose angrily. "And why shouldn't those few watch over us? The ordinary man has neither the education nor the interest to choose a government for himself. When they threw Mackenzie's printing press in the harbour at York, they should have thrown the man with it!"

"Maybe so, cousin," John Alex said mildly. "But I think both you and I have enough common sense to know you can't drown ideas, and violence breeds violence, after all."

"And do you think this man Mackenzie would not turn to violence to get what he wants?" Papa glared at John Alex as if he were a rebel himself.

"Husband, please, leave politics to the study and the meeting house," Mistress Macpherson said. "You make me so upset when you speak so!"

"Don't fret, Cousin Mary," John Alex said. "It's too far away at the moment to concern your household. I don't expect Master Mackenzie will be stirring up trouble in Napanee."

Master Macpherson leaned toward him, fork raised. "Don't you ever imagine that he hasn't got his supporters here, John Alex. I have my eye on that entire Carscallion clan down the river."

Henrietta started. "Are the Carscallions bad people, Papa?"

"Oh, dear goodness me!" Mistress Macpherson's face flushed. "Such dreadful talk to let the young ones hear! Of course, they're not bad, Henrietta. They are honest farmers, some of the best in the township."

"If not bad, then certainly misguided," Master Macpherson said. "They came here in the first place from the United States, and as far as I can see, they're nothing but Yankee Republicans bent on reform, stirring up trouble with their Methodist preachers all about the country!" He banged his fist upon the table until the dishes rattled.

Whatever a Yankee Republican is, it isn't good, thought Henrietta. No matter what happens, I must never mention the children on the riverbank to Papa. He might think it some kind of rebel plot to spy on him!

Adam came to fetch John Alex's bag in the early afternoon. "The coach don't stop too long at Pringle's Tavern on the Sabbath, Master Macdonald," he said. "Twould be best for us to be early and waiting."

There was a flurry of good-byes on the front steps. "Give my regards to my brother Lowther," Master Macpherson began.

"And tell him we pray daily for his health," Mama broke in. "Do keep him from overworking himself. 'Tis what led to his present illness, I've no doubt."

"Then I had best watch myself too," John Alex said with a twinkle, "for I am carrying all his work and more. But if I should fall ill, I'll send for my little Henry here, and she shall be my nurse." He put his arm around her shoulder. He saw her sadness at his going.

"Henrietta, slip on your cloak and accompany John Alex to the coach," Papa said. "You may read your Sabbath text when you return."

"Oh, Papa, I'd love to!"

In a matter of moments, they were in the cutter skimming around the corner to the main street of the village. Two travellers were already waiting with their bags at the tavern door. Henrietta could hear loud voices inside.

John Alex winked at her. "I expect they don't see eye to eye in politics," he said. "I hope it doesn't come to blows."

Henrietta sighed. "Papa is always shouting about the govern-

ment. He tells me it is far away, in York, so how can it have anything to do with us?"

John Alex's brown eyes were suddenly serious. "My dear little cousin," he said, "the government of your country, no matter how far away it is, affects your entire way of life. It guards your freedom and your safety."

"It didn't help me to be free when Papa made me stay in my bedroom and miss all the laughter and fun with you," Henrietta reminded him.

"Aha!" John Alex tweaked one of her long brown curls. "In your own house, it is Papa's government that rules, and you were a rebel against it! What do you think of that?"

"I think you are clever, as Papa says, and rising in the world." She clasped his hand. "Oh, John Alex, don't rise so high that you don't come back to us! I would miss you so. Will you visit us again soon?"

"As soon as I am able, Henry." He smiled down at her as they heard the coach lumbering along Main Street. "The next time, I shall know better than to bring a gift that causes such an uproar in the household."

"Papa will let me have it soon, I know." Relief that the mirror was safely back in Papa's desk engulfed her. "The coachman is waiting, John Alex. You must go now."

He bent swiftly and kissed her warmly on both cheeks. "Remember, little cousin, the best mirror is an old friend." With Adam's hand to aid him, he mounted the coach step and gave a last affectionate wave. The driver urged the horses on with his whip, and the vehicle, snow cascading from its wheels, lurched forward and disappeared in the direction of the river and the eastern bridge.

In the cutter, she turned her face, scarlet with the wind, toward Adam. "My cousin says so many things I cannot understand, Adam."

"What now, miss?"

"He said, 'The best mirror is an old friend.' It sounded very wise, but it's all a puzzle to me."

"I'll have to think about it, Miss Henrietta," Adam said slowly. "I'll let you know if I get to the bottom of it."

The following morning when she mounted the sleigh for the drive to school, Adam was ready with an answer. "Miss, I believe he means we see ourselves in our friends. If we are good and kind, they will be good and kind too."

"But I have no friends at all," Henrietta said sadly. "Only John Alex, and he's gone far away."

"Far away or not, miss, he's worth a dozen of an ordinary sort," Adam said. "You can have great pride in his friendship. He always shakes my hand when he leaves as if I was his equal, and there's not many a gentleman will do that."

"Fanny's waiting for us at the door already." Henrietta pointed across the river toward the Briggses' stone house sheltered beneath the ridge. Through the willows, she could see her father's grist-mill, a great grey shape below the falls.

Golden-haired Fanny began to talk as soon as she had settled her long skirt and cape comfortably about her in the cutter. "Oh, Hen, you'd never guess what I have to tell you this morning! It's about somebody I saw!"

Henrietta thought at once of the girl in the moonlight. "With black hair?"

"Black as ebony, but that isn't all that was black. Just you wait! I'll tell you when we get to school and Mistress Dier leaves the room for a minute."

They jogged past Roblin Hill and saw the Ramsay Store and the Templeton Tannery on the riverbank. The store brought Henrietta a swift memory of John Alex in the old days, there at his desk in a cluttered corner among the groceries and dry goods.

Mistress Dier was her usual Monday-morning self. "We shall have no idle chitchat, young ladies. We shall have perfect deportment and manners as is becoming the daughters of gentlemen. The first hour will be devoted to the fine art of embroidery. You will find your frames and thread in the accustomed place on the shelf."

"Oh, not embroidery!" Henrietta grimaced to Fanny. "I had to do a sampler at home for Papa."

"Miss Macpherson seems not to have heard my first instructions," Mistress Dier said. "She will take her work to the corner of the room and sit there for the French lesson and the painting on velvet."

Henrietta took her chair to the corner. The moment the teacher

left the room, she tripped on her skirt in her haste to be at Fanny's side. "Now tell me," she said. "What was it you saw?"

"Everybody come here!" Fanny's whisper was loud and dramatic. "I have something to tell you!"

The girls crowded around, giggling.

"My papa took me with him in the cutter down the river to Master Lowe's fulling and carding mill, and you'd never guess what I saw. A black man!"

"A black man!" Henrietta gaped at her. "You mean all black?"

"I do, indeed. He almost frightened me out of my wits when he came to the door of the mill," Fanny said.

Henrietta was astounded. First the girl in the moonlight, and now a black man! "What was he doing at Master Lowe's fulling mill, Fan?" she asked.

"He is Master Lowe's slave. Papa said he has just been sent here from the Lowe family in the United States."

Little Anna McNeill pushed her way to Fanny's side. "Miss Fan," she said. "What is a slave, please?"

"Slaves are people who belong to other people, just as horses and cows and dogs belong to them. That's what Papa told me. He said . . ." But Mistress Dier returned with the slates and an assignment of fifty lines apiece to be written in the copybooks for misbehaviour while she was absent from the room.

When Henrietta arrived home in the afternoon, Donald was in the woodlot helping Adam to saw logs for the fire. The two young boys were playing in the snow nearby. They ran to her shouting, "Hennie, pull us on the sled down the bush road! Please, Hen?"

"Why don't you make a sled-run down the hill to the river?" Henrietta suggested. "I'll help you later. There's something I want to ask Donald now."

"It's always some other time," Alexander grumbled. "Come on, Jamie, we'll do it ourselves. Girls never want to do anything."

"What's the question, sis?" Donald loaded the wood on the stoneboat. "Was Mistress Dier her own sweet self today?"

Henrietta made a wry face. "I spent the morning in the corner, but don't for goodness' sakes tell Papa, or I'll be sent to my room for a week." She lowered her voice. "Donald, does Papa have any slaves?"

Donald looked astonished; then he laughed. "Yes. Me! Can't you see? I'm always slaving around the mill or the store. He'd be after me with a cat-o'-nine-tails if he caught me napping!"

"Donald, be serious! You know what I mean — people he can buy and sell. I heard today there were such people in our own village."

"Has that snip of a Fanny Briggs been telling you tales again? You should know better than to believe her. She likes attention, and she makes up stories to get it." Donald turned to Adam. "Is that load big enough, Adam?"

"I think it is, Master Donald. Come along, miss. Hoist up on the logs, and we'll give you a ride to the house."

Atop the woodpile, swaying with the motion of the low-slung sleigh, Henrietta was silent. Perhaps Fanny had invented the whole thing. If, as John Alex had said, the government was there to keep us free and safe, how could a man be bought or sold in Upper Canada? Besides, she could not believe a man could be coloured entirely black, even if she had seen pictures in her father's books. She would not bother to ask Papa about it. Now that she thought about it, it was all too ridiculous for words.

Her father seemed, these days, too busy for questions, working late at the store for three nights. And late on Thursday afternoon, he blustered in the back door. "Rachel! Becky! Mother! Here at once! I've news to announce."

Henrietta scurried out of the kitchen. "What is it, Papa? Something exciting?"

"A meeting. The gentlemen of the district are coming here tonight to discuss important business. I want the ballroom shining and table and chairs set up for their comfort. Rachel, fresh cakes and tea following, if you please, and the best china." Papa made straight for his study.

Mistress Macpherson looked faint. "Oh, dear, another to-do! There's never enough time for it all! The gentlemen, he said. That means Squire Campbell and Squire Briggs, Master Detlor and doubtless Master Pringle." She was counting. "But he never did say how many. Lucy had best leave the babies to Henrietta and come down and help."

"Now, mistress, be calm," Rachel said. "There's no need to fetch Lucy."

Thank goodness, thought Henrietta. I don't mind tending the boys, but the babies are too much for me. Aloud she said, "Mama, what could it all be about?"

"You know there's no use asking your father, Henrietta. He'll tell us in his own good time. What shall we have with the tea, Rachel? What shall we have with the tea?" She flew down the passage to the kitchen.

"Mistress, Rachel can make some apple tarts. They'd win any gentleman's heart." Becky ran to get the mop and duster. "I'll be on my way up to the ballroom. When I'm finished, they'll all be able to see their whiskers in the floorboards."

The house was in complete readiness when the first gentleman, Master Alexander Pringle, drove to the door at half past eight and handed the reins of his sleigh to Adam. Henrietta in her nightgown tiptoed out of her room and hid in the darkness of the hall to watch.

Master Macpherson was there to greet the guests, and as Becky ushered them in, Henrietta strained to hear the phrases that passed between them. "A night of great importance to us all." "Pleasure and promotion of business." At a gesture from her father, they mounted the stairs, and Henrietta slipped back to her room. If she sat as still as the china figure on her chest, she might hear what was going on upstairs. Once or twice, Papa pounded the table to emphasize a point. She had no doubt he would have his way. Because he was said to have the greatest business wisdom in town, all the other merchants and craftsmen looked up to him. It was so hard to wait. What harm would there be if she crept upstairs to listen? There was only one way to do it without being seen. From the kitchen, stairs ran steeply up to the servants' quarters. The workroom was at the top, and from it, a little hallway reached out to her parents' room. This hallway was used only on rare occasions when Mama or Papa had to summon servants in the night. In fact, it was so narrow and well hidden by a cupboard door that she and Jamie and Alexander had many an exciting game of hide-and-seek there in the semidarkness.

She crept into the kitchen and, seeing Rachel with her back to the door, up the stairs. She waited a moment for her eyes to grow used to the darkness. She could make out the doorways to Rachel's and Becky's rooms and the extra rope bed under the eaves. In a

moment, her hands felt the rough pine walls of the little passage, and she groped her way along it. Once in her parents' room, the candles from the sconces on the hall wall lit her way, and the carpet on the floor silenced her footsteps as she tiptoed to the ball-room door.

"There must be handbills, of course, distributed to all the villages round about." Her father was speaking. "They can be posted on every tavern door and every hitching post in the vicinity of Napanee."

"Allan, your own mill would surely be the best of places to put a large notice of the event, would it not?" Master Pringle suggested. "Every farmer for miles around brings his flour there to be ground."

"Or comes to pay the rascally price Allan asks for his lumber!" Henrietta imagined the rotund Master McNeill digging Papa in the ribs as he spoke.

"Now what about the womenfolk?" Master Shorey put in. "There must be something to keep them happy. After all, they'll be planning the food and drink to keep us content while we're looking over the stock and choosing the prizewinners."

Prizewinners! In her excitement, Henrietta bumped her elbow on the door. That put an end to the listening. Even as she ran pell-mell into her parents' room and hid in the passage, she heard Papa open the door and call, "Was that you, Rachel? We shall not need refreshments for at least another hour." The door slammed shut.

As Henrietta leaped down the stairs, Rachel, taking the apple tarts from the oven above the hearth, gaped after her. She fled to her own room and pulled the coverlet over her head. When she was quite sure Rachel or Becky had not followed, she lay thinking about what she had heard. There was to be something for the womenfolk, and surely for the children too, and prizewinners! She could not imagine what it could be, but she lay picturing troupes of players arriving in ribbon-decked wagons with dancers and singers and fiddlers. Papa, in his best morning coat, would stand on a platform awarding a red ribbon to the best of them.

Becky had to shake her awake in the morning. "Miss, Miss Henrietta, do get up! Your papa wants all of you at the table, and he does seem in a grand good mood. It must be something very special."

"Oh, Beck, help me to dress quickly. He's going to tell us what happened at the meeting last night."

She was the last to slip into place at the table, but her father did not scold. His ruddy face was glowing. "We've a bit of news for all of you that takes our village a giant step forward," he said, "and will bring fame to the township of Richmond." He rose. "By Royal Proclamation of King William the Fourth, the fair is coming to Napanee!"

The fair! Donald had mentioned it, but she had forgotten all about it with thinking of the girl in the moonlight.

Papa went on. "The Napanee Fairs have been established half yearly, to be held in the months of March and September. They will take place on the newly appointed fairgrounds across the river from the Macpherson household. All and sundry in the counties of Frontenac, Lennox and Addington will be invited to bring their farm stock and produce for display and competition."

"Papa . . ." Henrietta wanted to ask about the prizes. Donald gave her a well-placed kick under the table, and she winced.

"There will be displays of embroidery and weaving for the women, and even a booth of the latest shawls and bonnets from the city. And for the children," he smiled at Henrietta, "a Punch and Judy show and a party of musicians to play jig tunes."

Wait till she told Alexander and Jamie up in the nursery! A Punch and Judy show and jig tunes! And goodness knows what else! And in the clearing right across the river where they could watch everything from the windows all day and night if they wished. The weeks of school would now seem endless, but even Mistress Dier could be borne if a village fair heralded the coming of spring.



Chapter 4

“**B**ecky! Beck, do please wake up! The fourth of March is here at last, and you’re to take me to the fair, don’t you remember?” Henrietta stood, fully clothed, in the chill of the room under the eaves and pounded the mound of quilts. “Becky! Do please hear me, Beck!”

“What is it, miss? What’s the matter?” Becky sat up in bed astonished. “Why, miss, it’s still dark, and you’re up and dressed!”

“It isn’t dark really, Beck. Just wait a bit, and your eyes will see that the dawn is breaking, and they’re starting to arrive already! The wagons from the farms, I mean. Come quickly to the window.” She tugged Becky after her.

Strangers had begun to enter the village on the preceding afternoon, some by wagon down the Kingston Road and some by sleigh, forced by the early thaw to keep to the snow that still bor-



dered the roads and trails. All the rooms in the taverns were taken, and still newcomers arrived by horse or foot. Andrew Quackenbush was sleeping people in his stable, and Masters Ham and McNeill had loaned their carriage sheds for shelter.

"Becky, did you ever see such a sight as that?" Henrietta flung up the window and leaned out in the crisp morning air. Through the mists rising from the river, the new fairgrounds loomed like a wonderland. Ribbon-bedecked booths surrounded a great area cleared of ice and snow in the centre of the field. At one end was a solid pine platform, at the other a fenced-in dais upon which Papa and others would sit to judge the events and the livestock. A babble sounded from the field as animals were driven into crudely constructed pens. Two pedlars, arriving early to find a choice spot, laid out their wares. The first rays of the sun glittered on something from their packs — jewellery, perhaps, or a beaded bodice for a Sabbath skirt? Henrietta craned so far out of the window that Becky caught at her. "Miss, you'll see it all soon enough." "It just can't be soon enough for me, Beck. Let's wake Rachel

and make a great noise in the kitchen. Then everyone will get up and we can be on our way."

At half past eight, Papa and Mama left from the front door in the best carriage with the red velvet lining. Red ribbons flew from hood and whip holder, and Adam, in a blue brocaded coat, was in the driver's seat. Papa, splendid in his best morning coat and top hat, and Mama in her French wool frock, fur-trimmed mantle and mauve velvet bonnet with ostrich plumes, were to open the fair at nine. They stood on the judges' dais while Asa Hawley, an old soldier from the War of 1812, blew on his trumpet. When Papa shouted in a loud voice, "In the name of King William the Fourth, I declare this fair open!" Henrietta thought she would burst with pride.

After Adam came to fetch Jamie and Alexander, she and Becky were free to roam through the crowds as they pleased. "It's the pedlars first for me, Beck!" she shouted, and tore off toward the two men with the knapsacks. Becky caught at her shawl and followed.

Bracelets and rings, ruffles and ribbons lay on the trays, jostling toy figurines in wood and leather and tiny china dolls. One of the pedlars had laid his sack on the platform beside him. On the new raw pine boards, it spilled its wares like a great horn of plenty. He was doing a brisk business already, and Henrietta had difficulty getting his attention.

"Sir, what is the little house in your sack?" she asked.

"Ah, miss, a treasure from across the seas," the pedlar said in a singsong voice. "All the way on a great ship this house come, miss. 'Twas said to have once belonged to a princess of the blood, it was. And sold to me by a family of wealth who had come on hard times. It's only four shillings, miss. It ain't everyone can own a house touched by a princess of the blood!"

"What's a princess of the blood, Beck?" Henrietta whispered.

"Goodness if I knows, miss," Becky said. "But it all sounds very grand and important."

"Papa gave me only four shillings to spend all day," Henrietta said. "I don't want to spend it all on the wee house."

"I could come down to three and six, miss," the pedlar said, "but it's worth a great deal more than that. It plays music, you see." As he lifted the lid, a waltz tinkled out of the box.

"Oh, Beck, how I would love to have it! It's almost as splendid as the castle-mirror!" Almost but not quite, because the mirror was a gift from John Alex.

"Why don't you look about a bit first, miss, to see if there's anything else?" Becky said. "I expect the music house will be here latter on. The pony race is about to begin now. We must watch to see if Miss Fanny's pony wins."

The crowds cheered as the ponies raced round and round the small track. Henrietta could see Fanny in her best green bonnet watching with her father from the judges' stand. Fanny was too much of a young lady to shout. Henrietta, however, clung to Becky's hand and screamed for the little grey pony, but in the end, it lost the race.

There was so much to see and hear that she did not know which way to turn. Becky pulled her toward the booth that displayed the latest in ladies' bonnets from Kingston.

"Ooh, Miss Henrietta," she said, "it's the green silk I like. What a fine lady I could be in that!"

"You can have all my bonnets any time you like, Beck," Henrietta said. "I hate wearing them." A man began to shout on a barrel by the river. "Another pedlar, Becky. Let's go!"

When they arrived, they found no tray of shining goods. The man on the barrel held aloft a dark brown bottle labelled in yellow.

"This is it, lad-ees and gentlemen of Napanee! The cure-all for your aches and pains! Guaranteed to cleanse the blood in the spring of the year! Guaranteed to heal the body of those sore complaints that plague our lives! The gout! The rheumaticky pains! The fevers! The ague! So pleasant-tasting your children will ask for more! Buy two bottles and bless your neighbour with one in time of his dire need!" The huckster shouted on endlessly.

Then Henrietta saw the young man staring at Becky. He was tall and broad-shouldered and wore homespun breeches and coat and a jaunty deerskin hat.

Suddenly smiling, he approached, tipped his hat and touched Becky on the arm. "My pardon, ma'am, but could you perchance be Miss Rebecca Welkin, late of Bath?"

"Why, Peter Fairfield, as I live and breathe!" Becky said. "I do be her, indeed! And the last time we saw each other 'twas in the

schoolroom, and you, in your mischief, had dipped my braids in the inkpot."

"All's forgiven, I hope, Becky," Peter said. " 'Tis one of the greatest pleasures of my life to meet you here."

Becky blushed. "What are you busy at now, Master Peter?" she asked.

"I've taken a farm in the bush down the river," said Peter. "I'm hoping while I'm here in Napanee to have it properly deeded. A Master Allan Macpherson is the Crown Lands Agent, I understand."

"That's my papa," Henrietta spoke up. "He does deeds and things in his study."

"This is my charge, Miss Henrietta Macpherson," Becky said. "I've a post in the household of Master Macpherson himself."

A great flood of reminiscing followed in which childhood days and school pranks were told again. Henrietta shifted from one foot to the other. "Oh, look, Beck!" she shouted. "There's the log chopping about to begin. I'm sure Master Fairfield will want to see that."

"I want not only to see it, Miss Henrietta. I want a hand in it!" The three of them made off toward the group that encircled the choppers and their woodpile.

The chips flew in all directions as two men, a log between them, worked to see who could chop through the log first. Peter won easily. Becky stood by, smiling proudly.

"He has turned into a fine young man, miss," she whispered. "Handsome as a prince!"

Her admiration grew when it came to the wrestling match. A mat of straw had been thrown down in a small arena, and here, two burly men attired in close-fitting woollen suits threw one another about like sacks of meal. When one lay prone, the winner called for a challenger from the audience. Without hesitation, Peter threw off his jacket.

Becky hid her face in her hands. "Oh, miss, I can't bear to watch. They'll break every bone in his body! Stop him, miss, stop him!"

Henrietta wondered at her concern, but she grasped Becky's arm in excitement. "No, no, Beck! All's well! He's thrown the stranger to the mat, and they've declared him the winner!"

To celebrate, Master Fairfield took them both to the refreshment booth where hot sausage pastries, meat pies and fruit tartlets perfumed the air. "It's not every day I have two such charming ladies to help me celebrate victory," he said with a bow.

Henrietta noticed that he had eyes only for Becky as he spoke. *They're so taken up with one another, they'll never notice if I slip away*, she thought. She took one look at them and fled.

A man went crying by her as she ran down the field. "Salve a-plenty! Salve a-plenty! Salve to save your hair and preserve the illusion of youth! Changes grey hair to brown in a twinkling! Brings a gloss never known to the human head!"

Master Pringle should get some of that, Henrietta thought as she ran. *His head's as bald as a plucked goose*. Then she caught sight of the shouting crowds at the gate and the wagon beyond it. Children were screaming with pleasure and reaching up their hands. The Punch and Judy show was arriving on its own little caravan! She made for it straightway and pushed her way to the front. The puppets began at once to enact a folktale. When Punch tried to pull a magic sausage from Judy's nose, Henrietta laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks. Adam was there in the crowd, Jamie and Alexander high on his shoulders rocking so with excitement that he could hardly keep his balance. Then Henrietta saw the girl.

As she eyed the mane of black hair, her heart leaped, and yet it might not be the girl of the moonlight on the snow. Many girls had black hair. Quickly she stole toward the riverbank where the girl was standing. It was the same one, there was no doubt of that. James Carscallion was beside her. Unobserved, Henrietta looked at the face, still pinched and white as the feathers on a hen's back. She was, strangely enough, not laughing like the rest, but merely staring with great round black eyes as if the enchantment were almost more than she could bear. Henrietta wished that she had saved a tart to push into her hand. Then she remembered the little music house in the pedlar's pack. Why not buy it and give it to her here and now? Without waiting to see the outcome of the play, she slipped through the crowds to the platform. The weary pedlar, deserted for the first time since his arrival, sat alone on the boards. He was about to lift his pack to his back when Henrietta came running.

"Oh, sir, don't go! I want to buy the little music house. Please, sir, I have my money by me."

"Ah, miss, you've come just in time." He groped inside his bundle. "Let me see, now. We did say four shillings, did we not?"

"Oh, no! You said you'd let me have it for three and six!" Henrietta reminded him. "Three and six was all you said."

"But 'tis a valuable piece of work, miss, and remember how I told you it had once been the proud possession of a princess of the blood? Four shillings and that's my last word." He began to do up his bundle.

"Oh, no, no! Don't take it away. I'll have it! Four shillings will suit me quite well." Henrietta took the money from her muff, snatched the box and ran down the field among the fairgoers. She tried to make up her mind what she would say when she reached the girl with the black hair. *I want you to have this gift as a token of my esteem.* She did not know quite what it meant, but Papa had had gifts with such words written upon them. *Please take this and let you and me be friends.* That was better — simple and honest. Even Papa would approve of that. Then she stopped short. The Punch and Judy show had moved to another part of the fairgrounds, and the girl was gone. She looked around slowly. Not until she heard Papa's voice raised in argument did she catch sight of her again. Papa was near the judges' stand with young Master Luke Carscallion. They appeared to be arguing. The Carscallion boy and the black-haired girl, fear on her face, were standing nearby, listening. The girl seemed afraid of Papa's violence. There was no doubt that the men were arguing about politics again. Perhaps Papa was calling Master Luke a Yankee Republican or a Reformer!

Already Master Luke was moving off in anger and the children with him. With Papa so close, she did not dare approach them. They followed Master Luke to the Carscallions' team of horses waiting for the team-drawing contest. Great sacks of grain were piled on a stoneboat at the end of the fairgrounds. The team that drew the load the most quickly to the other end of the grounds would be the winner. There was no doubt that the Carscallions were the favourites, for a lusty cheer went up as they hitched to the stoneboat and strained to make a getaway. The cheer was even louder when the first prize was announced. Henrietta watched her

father pin the ribbon on the team without a glance at young Master Luke. The latter called the children to him, and they all went off to their wagon and out of the fairgrounds. Henrietta stood watching them leave, the music house in her hands. The black-haired girl looked back, a long wistful look. Then they were gone across the bridge and away down the river road.

Henrietta felt bereft. The joy had gone from the day. Would she ever see her again? Not likely. Certainly now her father and young Luke Carscallion would do everything in their power to avoid one another. Who could the girl be? In looks, she in no way resembled James or his father, and her clothes were outlandish, as if they had been put together from other people's bits and pieces.

Henrietta wandered sadly toward the spinning and weaving booth. The carding contest was about to begin, and she thought she might find Becky there. A short, thickset man with curly grey hair stood by two women who were about to draw their carding combs across a tangle of sheep's wool. He must be a judge like Papa, Henrietta decided. But Becky was nowhere in sight. She was about to hurry away when a huge man appeared suddenly from behind the booth. She gaped in shocked disbelief. The skin on his face and hands was as browny-black as the silk in her best party frock! Fanny had been telling the truth. The judge must be Master Richard Lowe, owner of the fulling and carding mill, and the black man, towering head and shoulders above him, his slave!

The girl with the wild hair forgotten, Henrietta watched the black man's every movement. He was slow and moved with a curious shuffling gait. There was a sad faraway look on his face that haunted Henrietta in much the same way as the eyes of the girl.

As the carding contest came to a close, the sound of music rippled from the fairgrounds' gate. She saw the black man lift his head and smile. He spoke softly to his master and then began to move slowly toward the box sled by the riverbank that held four musicians. At a safe distance, Henrietta stole along behind him. The players struck up tune after tune — Scottish jigs, English ballads, national airs — until their leader, a round-faced jolly man in a red silk cape, leaned down and spoke to the black man. The latter nodded and clambered up on the box sled. The fiddler drew his bow across the strings, and the slave threw back his shoulders

and began to sing in a deep, resonant voice. In the silence that fell across the field, Henrietta heard every word.

*Jesus walked the lonesome valley,
He had to walk it by Himself,
For nobody else could walk it with Him,
He had to walk it by Himself.*

*We must walk this lonesome valley,
We have to walk it by ourselves,
For nobody else can walk it for us,
We have to walk it by ourselves.*

*You must go and stand your trial,
You have to stand it by yourself,
For nobody else can stand it for you,
You have to stand it by yourself.*

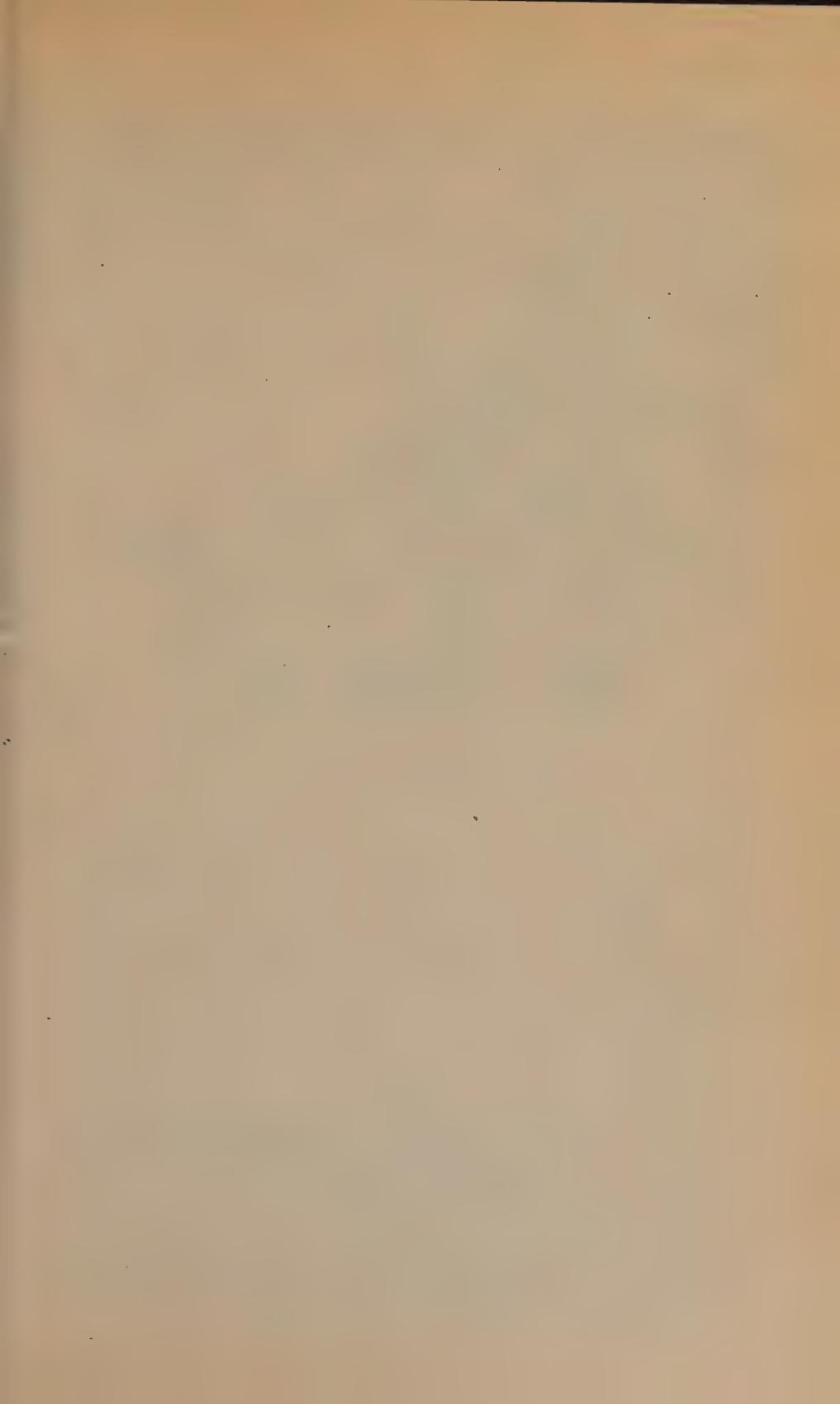
The words, and the feeling with which they were sung, were so intense that Henrietta found herself hardly able to breathe. There was no applause from the crowd when the song was finished. People stared at the black man with unabashed curiosity. Children came up to touch his hand as he clambered slowly down from the sled and walked, head bent, across the pony track to the weaving booth and his master, Richard Lowe.

"Oh, Miss Henrietta, you've given me such a fright! Wherever have you been?" Becky was gasping for breath. "I've run myself to pieces all over the fairgrounds looking for you, and Peter, dear boy that he is, has gone across the river, home, to ask Lucy if you was come there. What have you been doing?"

Henrietta, still caught up in the black man's spell, scarcely heard.

Becky went on. "You've missed seeing Rachel get a red ribbon for her corn pickle and her strawberry preserves, and Master Huffman win the prize with his seed wheat. Miss Henrietta, you've missed everything!"

Henrietta was thinking only of the girl with the black hair and the huge man with the black skin. "Beck," she said solemnly, "today, for the first time in my whole life, I saw a real slave!"





Chapter 5

On the night of Thursday, March 6, 1834, the first Napanee Agricultural Fair came to a glorious close with a torchlight parade all around the fairgrounds. Henrietta, in nightgown and shawl, leaned out of the workroom window high under the eaves, waiting for the first torch to flame.

"You'll catch it, miss," Becky warned, "if your mama finds you out of bed."

"But I couldn't miss the ending, Beck, and Mama will never know. She's over there across the river to hear Papa's speech from the judges' stand. Besides, I'm looking for something." *Somebody, not something*, she thought. Every day, she had curled up in the kitchen window seat to stare across the river into the crowds, hoping to catch a glimpse of the black-haired girl. But there had been none. Neither had she seen the great black man again —



only Master Lowe himself, busy with the fulling and weaving demonstrations at the wool booth. There had not been a single moment to ask Papa about the black man and slavery. If only John Alex had been there, she would have asked him, and she knew his answer would have been wise and thoughtful. A letter from him only yesterday wished Papa good fortune with the conduct of the fair and brought his warm regards to all the family, with a special note of love for "his little cousin Henry." But there had not been a word about the mirror. Henrietta had almost forgotten the feel of the smooth glossy wood and the dark romantic crevices of the castle. As for Papa, he had not mentioned it since the day he had taken it away.

"Oh, miss, looky! They've begun!" Becky's shout made her jump. "Oh, laws, miss, that is a pretty sight!"

The torches, a trail of glowing comets in the dark, moved with startling splendour around the field, and their reflection lit the snow and the deep recesses of the river water.

Henrietta stared. It was as if under the river there was a place

of enchantment where magic lamps burned over some hidden treasure. If only the girl with the black hair could have been there to see it! Suddenly, old Asa Hawley sounded his trumpet, and drums followed. Papa, in his respected post as major in the army, had called upon all the old soldiers to put on their uniforms and march. And there they were, the reds, greens, browns, the ancient cockaded hats and rusty swords, a little strange and out of place among the homespun-clad farmers with their prize cattle lumbering at their heels.

"They're leaving now, miss. You'd best get to bed, or your mama and papa will be arriving with their guests." There was to be a grand party in the ballroom upstairs for the officers of the Agricultural Society and their wives. What a pity not to be able to see the silk gowns and fur-trimmed capes! But Becky would never allow it. She followed Henrietta down the steep narrow workroom stairs. Rachel was sewing by the fire, old Adam across from her smoking his pipe.

"The parade's over, Adam," Becky said. "The master and mistress will expect you there any minute now with the carriage."

"We watched it from the kitchen window. What a fairy sight it was!" said Lucy. With her charges asleep in the nursery, she sat in the rocker and knitted.

It's strange how different are Lucy and Beck, Henrietta thought as Becky helped her into bed. They were both pretty girls, but Lucy's was a gentle face, childlike and innocent like the babies she cared for. Becky's rosy cheeks and saucy blue eyes were more to Henrietta's taste. It was no wonder Master Peter Fairfield had been taken with her at first glance. Henrietta knew he had called on Becky in the kitchen the previous evening. Peeking through the kitchen door, she had seen them whispering before the hearth. When he was leaving, Becky had said, "Please, dear Peter, don't come here again. Master Macpherson will be in a great rage if he knows his help is having callers in the kitchen!" Henrietta would never betray Becky's secret. In a way, they were two of a kind, she and Becky, and perhaps there would be a time when Becky would be called upon to share a secret with her.

Watching the candlelight flicker on the dancing couples on the wallpaper, she suddenly remembered the little music house. Now she would never have a chance to give it to the black-haired girl,

and their paths would never cross again. With the coming of spring, she might even leave Napanee altogether, without a word spoken between them. Hugging the music box, dreaming of a slender girl in a dress of bits and patches running in the wind with her hair a black banner behind her, Henrietta was asleep before the first guest drew up at the front door for the Macpherson ball.

For days, there was nothing but talk of the fair. One evening when Papa gave the children permission to pop corn at the kitchen hearth, the talk still centred on it.

"I never did see such a fine array of knives," Donald said. "The tradesmen brought them all the way from York, but Papa wouldn't hear a word of my buying one."

"'Twas my prize ribbons that pleased me best," said Rachel as she poured the corn into the skillet.

"Nothing could have been better than the Punch and Judy," Alexander put in. "Jamie and me was trying to play like them, but Jamie cried when I knocked his head about, so I had to stop."

"My poor precious lamb!" Becky cradled Jamie in her arms. "You'd best not be doing that again, Master Alexander. Wee Jamie's head isn't stuffed like a doll's."

"Hey, there, Beck, what did you like best?" asked Donald.

Becky considered, half smiling. "I do believe it was the wrestling, Master Donald."

"The wrestling!" Donald, astonished, nearly dropped the pan of melting butter. "I thought women frowned upon such savage things."

Henrietta saw the sudden blush in Becky's cheeks. She knew well enough why Becky liked the wrestling. "She liked it because it was all so different, Donald. Beck does not see such a feat of strength every day, do you, Beck?"

"No, miss, no indeed." Becky smiled at her gratefully. From now on, the secret of Master Fairfield was between them. "And you, Miss Henrietta, what did you like best of all?"

The girl with the black hair, Henrietta thought. Aloud she said, "The pedlars with their packs. I always wonder what I shall find among the shiny things." Then she remembered the slave and his song. Staring into the fire, she fell silent, the memory of the deep sad voice welling up in her.

"Cheer up, sis." Donald gave her a quick poke that nearly sent

her sprawling on the braided rug at her feet. "There's to be a fair again in September, you know. 'Tis not so long to wait."

"Long enough," Henrietta said. "And Mistress Dier's cross face to look at every day."

And yet, with the sun growing warm and melting the snow-drifts, the days flew by. On the morning that Mama lined them all up in the morning room for their annual tonic of tansy tea, spring officially arrived. But even the bitterness of the tea was forgotten in the joy of seeing the ice breaking up in the river and the water flooding over the banks.

One afternoon in early April, when Adam brought her home from school, they saw the first of the logs coming down the river. Master Macpherson himself was just riding in from the mill.

"Look, Papa," she shouted. "The log drive! It's begun!" She watched the logs butting one another in the swirling water. "Papa, where do they all come from?"

"From the forest up above Varty Lake," Papa told her. "All winter long, the lumbermen work in the bush cutting down trees. They load them on the ice of the lakes and rivers. When the spring flood comes, the logs come with it. These will be sawn and piled at our sawmill and taken to England in a great ship."

"Oh, Papa, could I see the ship when it comes?" Henrietta said. "I would dearly love to see it. *Please, Papa?*"

"The great ships leave the seaport of Montreal, childie. Only schooners go down the Napanee River."

"But a schooner would do, Papa. I have never as much as seen a schooner come and go. May I see one when it comes?"

"Perhaps," Papa said. "There has been less willfulness and more good manners about the house lately than we've been accustomed to. 'Tis time we rewarded good behaviour in some fashion."

Henrietta wondered if she dared to ask for the mirror. It seemed like such a golden opportunity.

"There's a big schooner coming up to the Cartwright Mill in two weeks' time," her father went on. "It's to take on seven hundred barrels of flour for shipment across the ocean. If you're a good lass, I might ask Mistress Dier's permission to keep you from school for the day and have you accompany me to the mill."

Henrietta could scarcely believe her ears. A visit to the mill with Papa, and on a school day too! The Cartwright Mill was called

the Big Mill and sat down the river a piece on the north shore, opposite her father's mill. This building had given Mill Street its name and her father some keen competition business. Still, Papa had so many successful enterprises that he had no need to fret about a little competition. It was Papa's gristmill she wanted to see, after Donald's tales of the place. Perhaps they would go across the river and spend some time there. It was worth perfect behaviour for two weeks at any rate. Not one hasty word would pass her lips.

The two weeks passed quickly with preparations for the visit of important church men to the Macpherson household. There was the Reverend John Stoughton, who had once held services in the village, the Reverend Saltern Givens, their own rector, and a third gentleman, tall and solemn in clerical coat and collar, who gathered the family together at morning devotions and asked in ringing tones for the Lord's blessing.

"Why do they pray so hard over us, Papa," Henrietta asked when they were gone. "Do they think we are very bad?"

"A sound prayer will hurt no one, childie," Papa said. "But this time, he is asking God's blessing on plans we have for a new church."

"Do you mean we shan't have to meet in the schoolhouse anymore?"

"Not when the church is built, lass. It's planned for a site across the fields there on Thomas Street and will be all of stone. I've given the land myself and shall oversee the building."

"Oh, Papa, will John Alex come back to us then to sing in the choir, just as he used to?" The very thought made her smile.

"'Tis not very likely, lass. From what I hear, he's much too busy. He's trying to get the two villages of Picton and Hallowell to unite," Papa said. "And his parents are at the Stone Mills at Glenora now, mind you, and he must take time out to visit them."

"Will he never come back, Papa?"

"Not to stay, childie. John Alex is on his way up in the world. He's being talked about in the papers and making his ideas heard. He'll be too busy now to be thinking of his little cousin in a country village."

I don't believe it, Henrietta thought. One day, he'll come back, perhaps in the summer, and we'll go down to the riverbank together, looking for wildflowers.

The events of the following week drove all thought of her lawyer cousin from her mind. They began with Becky.

"Please, Mistress Macpherson," she said, "I'd be pleased if you'd allow me to go home every third night now that the days are getting longer. I can walk it quite well along the river trail, and my mama grows older and somewhat ailing. I promise to be back before the sun is up in the morning." Henrietta knew at once that it was Peter Fairfield and not an ailing mother who drew Becky home, but she did not say a word.

The trip with her father came at last, and the day was golden with spring sunshine. She was astonished to find, when she opened the front door, that Adam had brought round the second-best carriage with the worn blue velvet lining. Adam grinned.

"'Tis a big occasion, miss. The master says when he takes his daughter to the mill, she must ride in style."

Henrietta sat proudly by Papa's side, eyeing the sights all around her as Meg trotted down the village street. At his own store, the clerk stood in the doorway and waved as they passed. Several people in the tavern yard bowed, and Papa tipped his hat. As they were passing the copper's shop, with the barrels he had made piled high beside the fence, Henrietta reached for her father's hand. Master Richard Lowe was coming out of the gate, and behind him, staggering under the weight of a huge barrel, the black man.

"Papa," she said, "look there! Fanny Briggs told me that man is a slave and can be bought and sold like a horse! But it isn't true, is it, Papa?"

"I fear it is only too true, child," Papa said. "In the United States to the south of us, there are many such slaves. Joe there has been sent up to Master Lowe from his family in the States."

When Henrietta turned to look behind her, her father tapped her shoulder lightly with the whip.

"We do not stare at what does not concern us," he said sternly. "This is Master Lowe's business, not ours."

"But, Papa," she insisted, "John Alex told me that the government kept us free. Why is the black man not free?"

"There's a move afoot now in the lands of our Empire to make him so, Henrietta. We shall have to wait to see if it amounts to

anything. It will be a different matter in the United States. Thousands of slaves there toil in the cotton fields and keep their masters in idleness and luxury. Slavery will not be abolished there without a great battle."

Henrietta stole a swift glance backward. Master Lowe was driving off toward the fulling mill, the black man crouched among the barrels. "Papa," she said, "does Master Lowe whip Joe?"

Papa looked shocked. "'Tis to be hoped not, child. I would see to it that Master Lowe was outlawed from the community if such were the case. Don't fret over old Joe. He has a good home with Master Lowe, and as long as he stays with him, he is safe from harm."

But what if Master Lowe sold him to someone else, Henrietta thought, *someone with a long ugly whip and an equally ugly temper?* She did not want to think of it. There was nothing she could do for the black man but hope that he stayed where he was.

Her spirits lifted as soon as they came in sight of the river. Ahead, the large framework of the Cartwright Mill hugged the northern shore.

"Papa," she cried out, "the schooner's at the wharf!"

"We're just in time," Papa said. "By appearances, she's all loaded and about to set sail."

He flicked Meg with the whip, and they trotted quickly down the road, pulling up sharply high on the riverbank to watch the scene below. At the river's edge, Master Cartwright and several burly young men were rolling the last barrels of flour aboard, and the anchor ropes were already being cast off. With a shout from one of the sailors, the sails went up slowly like the wings of a mammoth bird. As the ship began to glide away from the wharf, Henrietta stared, bewitched by its beauty and its effortless movement downriver.

"Oh, Papa," she said, "it's all so lovely, I cannot believe it's true. If only I could be there, amongst the barrels, watching the shores and all the sights slip past!"

"That ship is not bent on pleasure, lass," Master Macpherson said. "She's on her way to Kingston with a cargo, and I expect the sailors have had quite enough of scenery when the trip's done." He turned the horse about and headed for the floating bridge. "But there's no reason why we can't drop in on the Macpherson Mill

while we're down by the river. John Cartwright may have a fine mill, but the settlers still prefer the Scotsman's mill for grinding their grist the way they would have it."

"Papa, it's even better looking than the Big Mill!" The Macpherson Mill was more picturesque, nestled in the valley at the foot of the falls and surrounded by huge willows trailing long yellow banners of leaves into the water. The roar of the falls leaping over the limestone crags filled the air, but above it, she could hear the clatter and slap of the mill wheel as the water from the race rushed into the wooden paddles and made a continuous turning.

Papa tethered Meg to the hitching post and helped Henrietta to the ground. "You may wander about a little yourself while I have my say with my miller, Eli Weekes. When I call you, come at once, or there'll be no more such trips, I promise you."

"Papa," she promised, "I will be in the carriage before you are turned about to go home."

Inside the mill, they were greeted by clouds of flour dust dancing in the sunbeams that shone through the cracks in the mill wall. Master Weekes was standing by two huge whirling stones, pouring grain in at a hole in the top. These were the grindstones, powered by the wheel outside at the falls. Henrietta watched, entranced, as the flour, ground to a powder, shot out of the runnels and into the hoppers below the stones. Without this flour and the services provided by her father's mill, she knew, the settler farmers would have no bread and no winter feed for their cattle. What fun it would be to pour the grain into the hole as Master Weekes was doing! Suddenly a mouse scuttered out from a mound of grain at her feet, and she jumped back, startled, and ran outside.

As she went to sit beside the millpond, a covey of wild ducks rose from the reeds with a rustle of grey-blue wings. The water, calm and placid, looked inviting, the green world of the willows mirrored in its depths. She glanced carefully about, but there was not a soul in sight. Papa was around the other side of the mill engaged with Master Weekes for some time. Carefully, she took off her shoes and long stockings, held up her skirts and dipped her feet into the still water. It was delightful. Cold, certainly, but fresh and quickening like a drink of Rachel's bittersweet lemonade in summer. The noise above her head so startled her that she let her

skirts go and they trailed in the water. Hastily she caught at them and looked up. It must have been a bird, a blue jay, perhaps, surprised to find her there keeping him company. When it came again, she knew it was no jay. She glanced up in time to catch sight of the face, small and white and framed by the yellow-green leaves of the willow. She leaped up, knocking her shoe into the water. It was the girl with the black hair! She was among the branches right above her head! Henrietta stood quite still and peered upward. There was nothing but silence and the secret whispering of the leaves. Then she heard Papa calling. How could she go now? She had only to reach up her hand and pull back the branches, and she was sure the girl would be there! Papa called again, and she remembered what he had said. Hurriedly she found her shoe and jammed it on her foot. The water squished noisily as she ran around to the carriage. As she rounded the corner of the mill, she saw a mane of jet-black hair intertwined with willow leaves. Then it was gone. The girl was there, that was all she needed to know. Whatever happened, Papa must bring her to the mill again. Her heart was filled with joy as she leaped, unaided, into the carriage.

"Oh, Papa!" she said. "This has been one of the best days of my whole life! I can't wait till I come here again."

Papa beamed with pleasure. "See to it that you behave yourself and you shall, childie."

He gave rein to the horse, and they trotted off home, the wet shoe soaking her small foot and the wet skirt clinging to the carriage seat with the faded blue velvet lining.



Chapter 6

“**B**ut what is she to do, wandering about there and in danger of drowning if she falls into the mill-pond?” Mistress Macpherson wrung her hands in her apron. “I’ve quite enough to worry me, with all the young ones wanting to roam the wild woods, without having Henrietta risk her life for an entire afternoon beside the river.”

“Henrietta has reached an age when she must learn some self-reliance,” Papa said. “The servants are too close at hand here, particularly Becky. They’re always running at her summons. It would do her no harm to lend a hand in the mill if she wished it. After all, ‘tis where her bread and butter comes from, and there’s nothing demeaning about an honest day’s work.”

“Oh, yes, Papa. I could sweep the floor for Master Weekes, just as I’ve seen Rachel do it here.” It was not exactly what she had

in mind, but Papa had asked her to go with him to the mill on this Saturday afternoon. And she had planned to take the music house with her. Now only Mama's fears stood in the way. "Truly I will be very careful, Mama. I won't put as much as a little finger in the water if you don't wish it."

"I never could stand up to you and your father both, so away with you now. But do take care!" Still frowning, Mama hurried to the kitchen to make up the week's menus with Rachel.

When they reached the mill, four wagons were already lined up in the lane with their loads of grist to be ground into flour. Henrietta followed her father to the door. Dust and flour clouded the air. Several men lounged about smoking pipes and chatting while Master Weekes busied himself with the grindstones. When they saw Master Macpherson, they took off their caps and nodded to him.

"Where's the broom, Papa?" Henrietta asked. "And what must I sweep first?"

"'Tis too busy for sweeping at the moment," Papa said. "Run along and behave yourself, or Mama will not trust my judgment again."

Henrietta made off. The sun was behind clouds and the air cool with a spring breeze. She ran to the millpond above the falls, delighting at the leap and thrust of the water over the limestone shelves. She had no difficulty finding the willow. It was the grandest one there. It was a queen, head and shoulders above all the others, trailing its enormous green velvet cloak of branches into the water. Its trunk was larger than any Henrietta had ever seen, with a curious cavelike hole where the two main stems met, large enough to hide two children. But Henrietta was not intent on hiding, not today at any rate.

Staring hard and long, she took in all the green canopy over her head. There was not a sign of anyone. A rustle of leaves made her look up expectantly, but it was only a bird, a startling crimson in the green dusk of the tree, flying to its nest. *Perhaps she's frightened and hiding*, Henrietta thought. Somehow she could not bear the thought of fear on the little white face. Hastily she threw off her cloak and began to climb. It was a wonderfully easy tree to climb, with nooks and crannies for toeholds and plenty of limbs for grasping. She came finally to the joining of two huge

The Secret of Willow Castle

branches where the limbs, all spreading flat, made a floorlike platform almost as large as the nursery at home. Henrietta sat and dangled her legs through the leaves. Little wonder the girl of mystery liked to come and play here. It was a secret place no person would suspect if one moved with catlike quiet and spoke softly. Henrietta sat listening to the roar of the falls below her and the cry of the ducks on the pond. Then, suddenly lonely, she slipped down the trunk and moved upstream to find a warmer spot out of the tree's deep shade.

Even today, with no sunshine, the water looked inviting. But she had promised Mama and promises must be kept. Then she heard the snap of a twig. A slender figure came running along the footpath, skirt flying like a ragged flag, black hair streaming. Her feet were bare, but she clambered up the tree with no effort and disappeared among the leaves.

Cautiously Henrietta came to stand under the green arch. What could she say so that the girl would not be frightened?

"Black-haired girl!" she called softly. "I want to be your friend!"

There was no movement from the tree. Henrietta began to climb. When she reached the juncture of the two great limbs, she saw the girl, wild-eyed with fright, backed against a branch.

For a long silent moment, they stared at one another. Henrietta moved to take her small white hand. It was trembling like the wings of a captured bird.

"Don't be frightened," she said softly. "No one can hurt you. This is my father's place and my father's tree. You are quite safe here."

The girl looked away. Suddenly Henrietta wondered if she could speak! Papa had told her of a boy in the backwoods who had been born without speech or hearing. Perhaps this wild thing was the same. But what about the night of the skating party? She had seen her speak to the Carscallion boy. "Please do sit down with me," Henrietta said. She herself sat and curled her legs beneath her. Obediently the girl did the same, turning her large dark eyes on Henrietta.

"Tell me your name, and then we can be friends," Henrietta said.

"Sarah." It was only a whisper.

"Sarah? Oh, 'tis such a pretty name! And what other name have you, Sarah?"

"I'll not be having another name. Sarah is all."

Henrietta gazed at her in astonishment. "But you must have another name! My name is Henrietta Macpherson. Everyone has at least two names and some even more."

The long tangled black hair hid the girl's face as she hung her head. "Master Carscallion told me I could use the Carscallion name if I was wanting to. But 'tis not my own. Sarah is the only name I'm remembering."

"But why?" Henrietta asked.

"They be telling me that I'm a lost one, that's all. I have no one really my own."

Some deep sadness was on the other child's face. Henrietta questioned her no more. She clasped Sarah's hands with both her own.

"Sarah, I will belong to you. You and I will be friends forever!"

"I have never had a friend," Sarah said, "only dream friends in Willow Castle."

"Willow Castle?" Henrietta thought at once that she was a lost princess. "Where is Willow Castle?"

The child's sudden burst of laughter was like the pealing of small bells. "Why, you are sitting in it right now, miss, and you don't even know it!"

"You mean this tree is your castle where you come to play?"

Sarah nodded.

"But if you are a lost child, how did you know about castles and things?" Henrietta asked.

"Old Lukey has told me tales of them. He is the very old one who is after sitting by the fire all day and remembering times long past." Sarah looked at Henrietta solemnly. "Once, long ago, he lived far across the ocean, and on a tall hill beside him, there was a grand castle. He has told me all about it."

"Oh, I wish he could tell me! But my papa and the Carscallions are enemies. They have had arguments about the way we are governed."

"I do know that, indeed." Sarah looked frightened again. "I thought you had come to put me out of my Willow Castle."

"Put you out? Oh, Sarah, I have watched for you so long, ever

since the night you came to the skating party! This is the happiest day of my life, since I have found you." She remembered to lower her voice. "Look now, we shall both come to Willow Castle. It will be our secret place as long as we live. Do you swear to tell no one of our friendship and our meeting place?"

"Oh, I do! Never a word shall be said by me. By all the saints I promise it." She had a curious lilt to her speech and a flattening of some of the sounds that captivated Henrietta. It was almost like singing.

"We shall meet here every time I come to the mill with Papa or the boys." Henrietta wanted to stand atop the tree and shout it to the world. And yet she would be able to say a word to no one.

"How shall I know when you are coming?" Sarah asked.

The question wiped the smile from Henrietta's face. "There is no way I can get in touch with you without Papa knowing, and that would be the end of the matter."

"Do you know Campbell's Rocks just before you arrive at the Carscallion farm?"

"I know it well." Many times on trips down the river road with her father, Henrietta had seen the sprawling stone fence that marked Squire Campbell's boundaries.

"Beside the road, there is a grand tall pine split by a lightning flash. 'Tis a fine place indeed to hide a note." Sarah's eyes shone.

"Yes, but how am I to get the note there?" All at once she remembered. "I know! I know, Sarah! We have a servant girl named Becky."

Sarah drew back. "You must be rich folks, indeed, with servants and all. In the Carscallion place, I am the servant who fetches the cows and mops up the slops at milking time. 'Tis not right that you should come here with the likes of me."

"Stuff and nonsense!" Henrietta said. "I want to be your friend, Sarah. I have no friend either, riches or no. Only John Alex, and he is far away now. Look here, I shall give Beck a note when she goes home to her own place down the river."

Sarah looked dubious. "Will she tell anyone about our Willow Castle and me?"

"Never!" Henrietta said. "Becky and I have more than one secret to share. No one shall ever know!" Then she remembered the present. "Sarah, I have something down there beneath my cloak.

Come down now and stay hidden behind the tree trunk, and I shall give it to you. Papa will be calling soon and I shall have to go."

At the base of the tree, their legs swathed in the long spring grasses, Henrietta found the little music house and gave it to her friend. "Open the lid," she said eagerly. "There's a surprise inside."

When the music began, the look on Sarah's face was pure delight. " 'Tis all yours," Henrietta said, "as a sign of friendship between me and you." Her papa's strident voice boomed from the mill lane. "There's Papa now. I must go. Oh, Sarah, I am so happy that I found you!" Then she swept up her cloak and sped down the hill to the wagon. As she reached the mill wheel, she looked back. The black-haired girl stood in a golden patch of sudden sunshine like an elfin creature from an enchanted world.

"Why is my childie smiling?" Papa clambered into the wagon beside her.

"Oh, Papa, spring has come and the whole world is shining!"

Papa looked down on her approvingly. "This is the Lord's world, lass, and it is good to be grateful for it."

Today her heart was bursting with gratitude. Nothing better or more filled with promise had ever happened to her in her entire life. It was astonishing how she and Sarah each had a castle of imaginings. The next time, she would have to tell Sarah of the beautiful mirror and the castle frame around it. She would tell her about John Alex, too, and the story of the stolen knife. And what about the secret hiding place in the desk? Would that not be a wonderful place to hide the notes to Sarah? What a wonderful adventure! Secret messages, a secret hiding place and a secret friend! She would have to tell Becky about the desk and show her how to get into it, but Becky could be trusted.

"Mama and I shall be going on a trip to Kingston next week," Papa was saying. "See to it that you behave yourself, and there may be something brought back for you."

If Papa went to Kingston, there would be no visit to the mill! "Will no one be going down to help Master Weekes, then, Papa?"

"Donald will go. He must learn more and more of the mill ways. One day, he will take the business over from his old papa."

"Is Mama going to buy a new hat or a new ball gown, Papa?" She must try to think of some way to persuade Donald to take her with him.

"Those, and spring clothing for the young ones. Mama tells me that you shall have your new dresses made by the seamstress in Napanee." Papa smiled down at her. "And if you are mindful of your ways, you may choose the material yourself and have a new velvet cloak besides."

Henrietta waited until bedtime to speak to Becky. "Becky," she whispered, "how is Master Peter Fairfield?"

Becky blushed. "Oh, miss, he's well enough, I suppose."

"Beck, you know you don't need to suppose at all. He's courting you at your own hearthside and I know it! When will you be married, Beck?"

"Oh, miss, please don't breathe a word! If your papa heard of it, he'd be looking for someone new, and I should lose my place with you. It won't be for a long time, miss, I promise you. Dear Peter has to put some money by so that he can furnish his cottage for me as he'd like to. Promise you won't tell, miss!"

"Of course I won't tell, Becky. I liked what I saw of him, and I daresay, when Papa meets him, he will like him too. But we needn't breathe a word till you're ready to marry." She came closer in the candlelit dusk of the room. "Beck, there is something I want you to do for me."

"Miss Henrietta, please don't ask me to do anything that will get us both into trouble!"

"It won't get us into trouble if we keep it a secret, Becky. Come with me." She took the puzzled Becky by the hand and stole out of the room. Voices and clatter came from the kitchen on the other side of the house.

"What are we doing in here, miss?" asked Becky, as they entered the study.

"I told you. It's a secret. Watch me." By the light of the candles in the hall wall sconces, she drew down the writing surface of the desk. Pressing on the outside rim, she watched Becky's face as the panel slid noiselessly back, disclosing the secret compartment.

Becky fell back, startled. "Oh, miss, what have you done?"

"Don't you see, Beck? It's a secret place for hiding things. It's been in Papa's desk all the time and we didn't know! Papa doesn't use it, but we're going to. Now, Beck, you try to open it yourself."

"But, miss, what would your papa say?"

"It can't be of any interest to him. We're not touching a thing

that belongs to him. Look there, I know my mirror with the castle on it is on the topmost shelf, but I shan't lay a hand on it. This secret place is for messages, Becky."

"I don't know, miss." Gingerly Becky pressed the wood, and the panel slid back into place. At a word from Henrietta, she opened it again. Becky smiled. "I must say, miss, it's very clever. What are we to do with it?"

"Come back to the bedroom and I'll tell you." Henrietta dragged her down the hall and closed the door carefully. "Beck, I'm going to be leaving notes in there. When you dust the desk, you're to see if there are any messages. Whatever you find, take it and leave it in the tree by Campbell's Rocks, the one that's been split by lightning."

"Whatever for, miss?" Becky asked.

"You mustn't ask questions, Beck. It's a secret and I can't tell."

"But, miss, couldn't you just give me the notes when I put you to bed at nights?"

"Beck, it's a secret adventure, and we must have a secret hiding place." A new thought occurred to her. "And if you find any messages in the lightning tree, bring them back and put them in the secret panel. Do you understand?"

Becky pulled back the bed curtains and shook her head. "Miss, I've a feeling it's not right, all this business of secrets. I do hope you're not doing anything wrong."

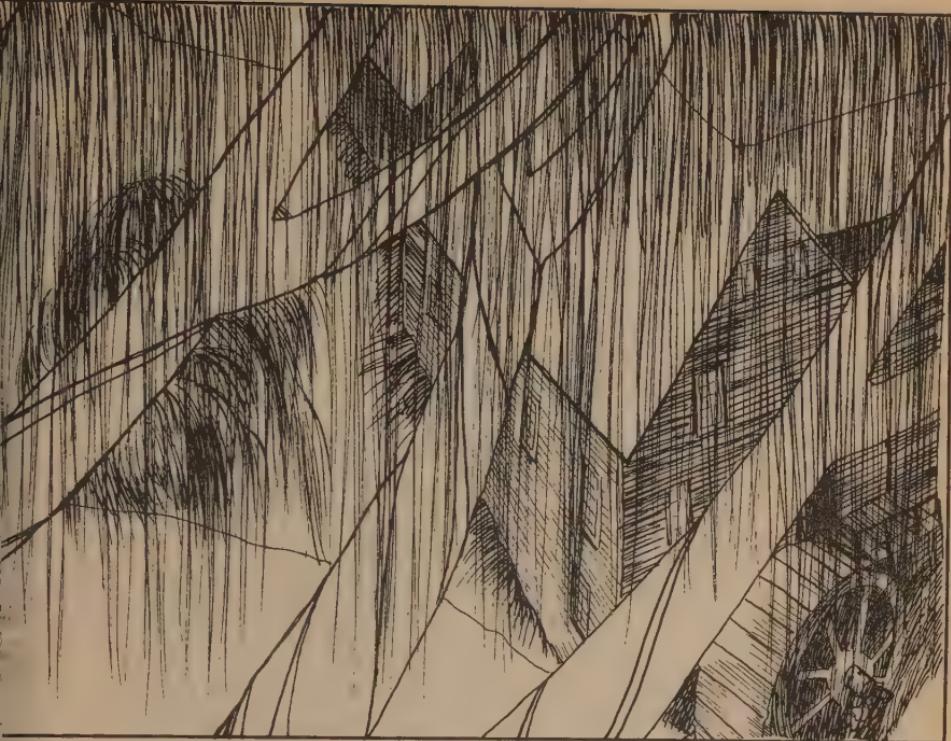
Henrietta smiled up at her from the pillow. "Oh, Beck, there's nothing wrong about it at all. It's the rightest thing that's ever happened to me. And please, look tomorrow. There'll be a message to carry then."

When Becky had blown out the candle and left for the kitchen, Henrietta closed her eyes and was once again in the lofty secret world of the willow. A secret place and a new friend, no one could ask for more. And with vacation time in a month and a half, the summer stretched endlessly ahead, filled with golden possibilities of adventure in Willow Castle.



Chapter 7

She was up and in her father's study before the rest of the household was astir. She reread the note before she placed it behind the desk panel. *Dear Secret Friend, We shall meet again on Saturday. I cannot say if in the morning or afternoon. Keep silent and watch for me.* She wondered how she should sign it. Donald and the little ones called her "Hen," a name she disliked immensely. Only John Alex called her "Henry," but Sarah would be as close a friend as he. Quickly she signed it, *Henry*, and laid the note in the secret compartment. That evening when Becky set off for home down the footpath beside the river, she patted her skirt pocket knowingly, and Henrietta knew the message was on its way. Now all she wanted to talk about was the mill. She found her father advising Adam in the stable. Bonnie Prince had been limping and must be taken to the Kessler blacksmith shop as soon as possible.



"Has Master Kessler's blacksmith shop been here as long as our mill, Papa?" she asked innocently.

"Lassie," Mr. Macpherson said, "nothing has been here longer than the mills. That's the way the entire village started. They chose Napanee as a site because the great falls on the river could provide power to run the mills. The settlers chose Napanee as a place to live because of the mills and the business that grew up around them."

"How long ago was that, Papa?" Henrietta sat on one of Adam's stiff-backed chairs.

"Master Robert Clark came from Cataraqui to build the first mill in 1785. That was forty-nine years ago." Her father gave her a long quizzical look. "Are you fixing to take the mill over from your papa, Henrietta, when you're a grown lady?"

Adam grinned. "Why, there be an idea, master. It's that one could make a go of it if anyone could. She has more of your blood in her veins than any of the others, from what I've seen."

"I shouldn't want to worry about all the farmers and whether

their grist was ground to suit them," Henrietta smiled. "I would sit all day beneath the big willows and listen to the roar of the waterfall." *Or up above it, in Willow Castle*, she thought.

"Sitting and dreaming will never build a business," Papa said. " 'Tis as well the men look after the affairs of this world, Adam, and leave the ladies to their sewing. Women were not born to figure ways and means."

But I have to figure ways and means, thought Henrietta. *Donald must be willing to let me go with him to the mill on Saturday*.

She found the right opportunity to approach him behind the strawstack in the yard on Wednesday afternoon after school. He was sucking on a straw and staring into the blue vastness of the sky.

"Hey, there, sis," he said, "don't tell Papa I'm here. I'm supposed to be helping Adam clean out the stalls, but John is coming to meet me and we're going to have a game of mumblety-peg."

"I'll help Adam for you if you'll do something for me," Henrietta said.

"Now what? Have you been getting into trouble again?"

Henrietta looked indignant. "Of course I haven't! I want you to take me with you to the mill on Saturday."

Donald sat up. "What's doing now?"

"I just want to go, that's all."

"Well, I can't take you because Papa wouldn't allow it," Donald said.

"But he doesn't have to know. You won't have to bother with me when we get there. I shall just play by the river all day and not get in your way at all. Please, dear Donald!"

"There's no use dearing me, sis. If you fell in the river, I should get the whipping, not you, for having taken you there in the first place. The answer is no!" Donald went off toward the figure approaching from the bush trail. "You may go to the mill when Papa goes and that's all. You know that's the way he wishes it."

Somehow, then, she would have to go without his knowing, but how? The answer came on Friday night, when she heard Rachel talking to her father in the kitchen.

"Yes, Master Macpherson, the flour's most gone, and I shall need more oats for the porridge before long."

"Give Donald the sacks from the storeroom tomorrow morn-

ing, then," Papa said, "and tell him to bring them home full. He's old enough to look after that for us now."

Empty sacks! If they were tossed into the wagon in time, she could hide beneath them! She could make sure they were there in time by putting them in the wagon herself.

Later, she came into the kitchen while Rachel was taking apple turnovers from the oven. "Papa said Donald was to take the sacks to the mill, Rachel," she said. "May I put them out in the wagon for you?"

Rachel looked surprised. "Why, yes, Miss Henrietta, but the boys could do it just as well tomorrow. Were you looking for an apple pastry perhaps?"

"I wouldn't say no to that, Rachel. Yours are the best in the world, so my papa says."

Rachel, pleased, set one aside. "Take it up when it's cool, and you'll find the sacks behind the syrup barrel."

In the darkness of the stable, she laid the sacks near the front of the wagon, almost under the seat board. There, too large a fold in the bundle would not be noticed. When she skipped through the kitchen again, she picked up the apple pastry. Even that had a place in her plans, another present for Sarah.

On Saturday morning, she heard the whisper in her ear before she was really awake. Becky was bending over her.

"Wake up, miss. Your mama and papa are all set to go, and we're to take you all to the front door to see them off." Becky flung a shawl about Henrietta's shoulders.

Mama was, as usual, concerned. "Lucy, you must keep the babies well covered all night long for fear the cough returns."

"Yes, mistress, I shall never leave their side, I promise you." Lucy dropped a quick curtsey.

Papa spoke to Donald. "See that you give Eli a good hand at the mill, and don't wait for work to be handed to you. Look for it." He turned to Henrietta. "Becky's in charge of you, lass, and I'll hear of no nonsense in any form. She's to take you all to worship on the Sabbath, and no whispering or kicking during the sermon."

"I'll be good, Papa," Henrietta said. "I wish you and Mama a happy trip."

With a shout and a wave, they were gone down the road in the

carriage, with Adam at the reins, to meet the coach for Kingston.

The rest breakfasted in the morning room, with Donald at the head of the table and Rachel and Becky giving the orders. There was an air of holiday about the house and much laughter.

"If John Huffman comes, Hen," Donald said, "tell him I can't go squirrel chasing till late this afternoon."

"Is that when you're coming home from the mill?" Henrietta asked.

"I expect so. Rachel has packed me a lunch, and the way old Eli makes me work on a Saturday, I'll be ready for it!" Donald went to the kitchen to take his jacket from a hook.

Henrietta had not thought of taking food! As Rachel disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, she scooped up bread, fried salt pork and two golden muffins and wrapped them in her napkin. When Rachel returned for more dirty dishes, she noted the empty places with some surprise, but by this time, Henrietta was on her way to the stable. Swiftly she called in to Adam, "Tell Beck I'm quite safe and won't be home for lunch."

Donald was still nowhere in sight. Slipping under the sacks in the wagon, she tried to flatten herself. If she knew Donald, he would not give a glance behind him. Her only problem would be to get out of the wagon at the mill without his seeing. He came in, whistling, a few moments later and hitched up Mapes and Meg. Before long, the wagon moved out into the spring sunshine.

Beneath the sacks, Henrietta was stifling with flour dust. Twice she buried a sneeze in her shoulder, and she wished that Donald would put a touch of the whip to the horses. Suddenly the wagon drew to a stop. *Now what?* Henrietta wondered. Lifting a corner of the sack, she peered out. They were at Papa's store! Donald had gone in to fetch some sweets from the candy counter! She was furious. Papa would have a thing or two to say to him about that. She wiped the flour from her eyes and sat up straight to breathe the clean fresh spring air.

"So, my pretty miss, what are you doing back there?" Donald had come out in a hurry.

Henrietta flung the sacks back and leaped to her feet. "I might ask you the same question, Master Donald. You know Papa would be in a great state if he knew you'd stopped to get sweets."

Donald grinned good-naturedly. "Ah, sis, it's only a little treat

to help the day's work go by. Don't tell on me."

"Very well, then. I shall sit up with you and ride to the mill in style." She stepped over the seat and sat beside him. She gave him a sidelong glance and they both began to laugh. Several farmers and their wives, in the village for the mail and the week's supplies, gaped at them as they drove down to the river and across the bridge.

"I guess we caught each other," Donald said at last. "Just see to it that you behave yourself, that's all, and don't wander into the bush and get yourself lost."

"I promise, Donald. I shall just play beside the millpond, and when you're ready to go, shout from the mill door and I'll come around."

"What you want to do down there all day, I'll never know," Donald said. "But then, you always were a queer one, Hen, with your imaginings. Here's the mill lane, so hop down and be on your way. Look me up at noon when you get hungry. I'll share my lunch with you."

"I have my own, Donald." She ran up the slope to the millpond. "I'll be here when you call." When he was well out of sight around the far side of the mill, she clambered up the tree trunk.

Sarah waited, curled up on the branches. "Oh, Henry, I thought you'd never come! Now I know it wasn't just a dream at all."

"Sarah, I've had so many fine thoughts about our castle!" Henrietta laid the napkin with its precious contents in the crook of the branches. "I think we should set about naming all the places in the willow, just as they do with a real castle."

"I'm not understanding what you be meaning." Sarah stared at her.

"Look overhead, now. The branches make a curving arch over our room in this part of the castle. We could name this arch for somebody special."

"It was old Lukey who told me all about the castle and so made the willow into one for me. Could we call it Old Lukey's Arch?" Sarah said.

"Not Old Lukey's Arch but King Lukey's Arch! It's perfect!" Henrietta moved about exploring. "Here's a branch that goes up in steps like a stairway. This could be somebody's stair. Do you have another favourite name, Sarah?"

Sarah sat quiet, thinking. "There is a name I remember. I'm not knowing why, because it is not in the Carscallion household."

"What is it?"

"Liam."

"Liam?" Henrietta repeated it with wonder. "'Tis a strange one to me, too, but I love it. Let us give it the name Lord Liam's Stair."

Sarah clapped her hands. "Oh, Henry, what a game this is! It's the best I have ever played. May we name something else, please?"

Henrietta peered below. "Down there, where the two forks of the tree join, there is a big hole, large enough for you and me to hide inside. That must be a dungeon."

"In Old Lukey's castle across the ocean, there lived a duke. Could the dungeon belong to him?" asked Sarah.

"The Duke of Napanee's Dungeon. Wonderful!" Henrietta began to clamber up the twisting trunk. "Let's see what's at the top of Lord Liam's Stair."

Sarah followed her, climbing effortlessly like a squirrel. "It is a grand place for looking," she said. "I have come here often to see the whole countryside."

Henrietta parted the branches. It was the topmost part of the willow; from it, the millpond, radiant in the spring sunshine, the mill and churning wheel, the splashing waterfall and shales of blue-grey rock made one glorious picture below. To the south, she could see the wide and placid Napanee River flowing gently down to Mohawk Bay.

"Look, Sarah," she called. "There's a Durham boat coming up to the Cartwright Mill."

They watched the boatman poling the long flat-bottomed craft slowly up to the mill to take on a load of flour. Across the vast rolling hills of hardwoods and pines, the smoke rose from the settler's cabins in the clearings, already emerald green with early spring planting.

"This is the very best place of all," Henrietta announced triumphantly. "It must have a very special name."

"There is no special name that I remember," Sarah said rather sadly. She brightened suddenly. "Could we name it King Henry's Tower?"

Henrietta laughed. "I'm nobody special, but I know someone who is. His name is John Alexander Macdonald, and he used to

have a law office in the Ramsay Store. Now he's gone to Hallowell on Picton Bay, and Papa says he will rise in the world." She spread her arms out as if to embrace the whole countryside. "Sarah, he couldn't rise any higher than this! We'll call it Sir John Alexander's Tower."

"It's a grand big name," Sarah said, "just like the place it is."

"Do you know, Sarah, it was this John Alex who gave me a castle too."

"Gave you a castle?"

"Yes, a castle on a mirror's frame," Henrietta said. "It's put away for me at the moment, but one day I shall bring it and show you." Somehow she did not want to confess her disobedience to Sarah. "Now come down because I shall give you a present to celebrate all the naming." Henrietta slid down the branch to King Lukey's Arch.

"Another present?"

"'Tis only an apple pastry this time. What did you do with the music house?"

"Hid it at home in my attic room," Sarah said. "I take it out and play it when all the rest are asleep. I am afraid they will take it away from me if they see it."

Henrietta was enraged. "Let them dare! I shall have my papa come and cast all those Carscallions in the village jail if they do. He could do it, too, because he is the Justice of the Peace in Napanee."

"Oh, no, don't do that! The Carscallions have been good to me. If it had not been for young Master Luke's kindness, I would still be wandering at the dockside without a home."

"What do you mean?" asked Henrietta.

"That was where Master Luke found me, in a place where the ships come in. The people there told him they fed and cared for me by turns and that I'd come off a great ship in the harbour. Then Master Luke picked me up under his arm and brought me away home."

"You mean there was no sign of a mama or papa that you belong to?"

"None at all. The people on the dockside told young Master Luke that my mama had been borne off the ship very ill with the fever, and no one could tell him where."

"Then perhaps your mama is waiting for you somewhere," Henrietta said.

"No, they all tell me my mama is dead. It was a bad fever called cholera, Master Luke says, and they told him many aboard the ship had perished with it."

"Here, Sarah." Henrietta shoved the apple pastry into the small hand. "Eat this and you will feel better. Papa says Rachel makes the best apple pastries in the whole world."

Sarah sat, unheedful of the treat. "Sometimes when I sit up here with the green all around me," she said slowly, "I remember another green place."

"Where?"

"I do not know. It was a place of green, green hills and blue water, and there was a little two-wheeled cart in which I went a-riding with someone."

How strange and terrible not to know where one had come from, Henrietta thought. "Think hard, Sarah," she said urgently. "You must remember a name!"

"No, there are never any names. Master Luke says I was too young to remember."

Henrietta stood up. "Listen! What's that?"

Sarah cocked her head on one side. "It's only a bird. There's one as red as the lining in Mistress Carscallion's cloak. Look, there he goes now, swooping through the leaves."

"He's very excited about something. Perhaps he doesn't like us here near his nest. It's over there in the maple tree."

"It's an old crow at his nest! Come up here and you can see for yourself." Sarah climbed to Sir John Alexander's Tower. The huge crow, screaming his disapproval, swept past her from the maple tree and out into the sunshine. "We've frightened him away, but the red bird is still flapping about. Whatever can be the matter?"

"I see it!" Henrietta said. "One of the little birds has fallen from the nest to the bushes underneath the tree. Sarah, we must fetch it and put it back." She slithered quickly down the willow's trunk but was back in an instant, a tiny olive-brown bundle in her hand. "Sarah, I can't put it back in its nest," she said. "It has a broken wing."

Sarah stroked the downy feathers. "Poor wee lost thing. Whatever shall we do with it?"

"Keep it," Henrietta said. "It will be our bird for always here in Willow Castle."

"If he grows like his papa, he'll be our scarlet prince!" Sarah said. "Do you think he will stay when his wing is mended?"

"If we are good to him, he will. Donald had a pet rabbit once that he found as a baby in the bush. It stayed for many a month. Perhaps our bird will stay forever here with us."

"We must feed it and make a soft nest for it somewhere," Sarah said, "out of the reach of Squire Briggs's hound dogs across the river."

"We'll make a place down in the dungeon," Henrietta said, "and you must bring it food whenever you can. You are free to come and go as you please, but I am not. Are you good at finding worms?"

"I have to help James find some for his fishing. There will be plenty for our wee bird." Sarah looked at the napkin. "May I eat my pastry now? I am hungry."

"Have some of the pork and bread with me first," Henrietta smiled. "Adventures in Willow Castle make me hungry too."

Later, they slithered down the trunk to drink at the spring that bubbled from the ridge behind the mill. Above the roar of the falls and the rumble of the wheel, they could hear the talk of the settlers whose wagons rolled in a never-ending parade up to the mill door. When they clambered again to their perch in King Lukey's Arch and out among the other branches, they discovered a drawbridge, crypts, and chambers for the castle guests. It seemed no time at all until the sun's rays were slanting from the west and Henrietta heard the shout: "Hen, where are you? I'll be ready to go in five minutes!"

"It's Donald," Henrietta said. "Sarah, will you fix the bird's home when I'm gone? I'll leave the table napkin, and that will keep it warm."

Sarah's face was full of uncertainty. "Will you come back again?"

"Nothing shall stop me!" Henrietta promised. "When I know I can come, I shall send a note with Becky. Meanwhile, I shall write letters, and you must write in return. Can you write, Sarah?"

"Oh, yes. Old Lukey has taught me all these things at the fireside. The young master would not let me go to school because he

said I didn't know as much as the others. But truly, with Old Lucey's teaching, I think I know more than James does now."

"Write to me, then. I shall be waiting." Henrietta slipped down the trunk. "Don't forget. There's no need to be sad now. You and I shall be friends forever!" Her last glimpse was of the pale smiling face framed by the willow leaves. Then she snatched up her cloak from the grass and ran around to the wagon.

After Donald had taken leave of Master Weekes the miller, he ambled over to the wagon and mounted. "Hen, you're lucky to be a girl. Old Eli kept me so busy today that my bones ache all over." He looked down at his sister. "And what have you been doing?"

"Playing in a castle."

Donald laughed. "You are a queer one, there's no doubt of that. And where might the castle be, young miss?"

"Among the willows." Henrietta turned to gaze at it as they jogged down the mill lane.

"A castle made of willows?" Donald was amused. "That couldn't be much of a place."

Henrietta remembered Sarah sitting among the branches holding the little olive-brown bird, and the splendour of the view from Sir John Alexander's Tower. "Willow Castle," she said solemnly, "is the finest castle in the whole wide world!"



Chapter 8

“**N**ow, Miss Henrietta, do be careful what you say this time,” Becky whispered, “and don’t have your present taken away because of a saucy tongue.”

“I’ll be good, Beck,” said Henrietta. They were about to slip into the morning room. Mama and Papa had come back from Kingston on the early-morning coach, and the whole family had been at the village tavern to greet them. They sat now in the midst of an intriguing pile of parcels before the hearth.

As Henrietta entered the room, she caught sight of her mother’s long, tired face. Suddenly recalling Sarah and the mother who was borne away and never heard of again, she rushed over and flung her arms about her. “Oh, Mama, it is good to have you back again, truly it is!”

Mistress Macpherson stroked the brown hair. Her eyes filled

with tears at the unexpected greeting. "Why, my dear, it's good to be back and to hear you welcome me so! I missed all my little ones more than I can say."

Papa looked surprised that the hugs had not been for him. "Has Papa not been missed too, lassie?"

Henrietta curtseyed to her father. "You have always told me I was too rough with my greetings, Papa." Then she leaped up and embraced him. "But just this once I shall forget that and welcome you home."

The parade of gifts followed with shrieks of delight from the small ones. A box of red and blue soldiers for Jamie, complete with cannon; a little carved wooden schooner with real sails for Alexander; and for Donald, the splendid knife he had always longed for. "Wonderful for carving birch branches and whistles," he said.

Henrietta remembered with sudden delight the story of John Alex and his knife. "If you don't use it carefully," she smiled, "you may find Papa using the birch branches on you!"

Papa beamed upon her. "Well said, lass! 'Tis no more or less than I was thinking myself. And now, childie, you've been the patient one. What would you most desire from Kingston?"

"A knife like Donald's or a pair of tall boots for hiking in the woods."

Mama shook her head. "What did I tell you, Allan? A tomboy she is and a tomboy she will always be." Then, recalling the greeting, she reached over and patted her daughter's hand. "There now, child, I do hope you won't be disappointed. The gift is neither of these."

Henrietta took the large flat parcel her father handed her. "If it's a book, I shall be well pleased, especially if it has a castle in it."

They all watched her tear at the paper. Inside was a stiff cardboard folder which she opened with great care. Her eyes widened at the sight of the painting lying in her lap. It was a huge blue heron perched atop a rock beside a flowing river, very like the river at her own front door. Gently she lifted the first picture. Underneath, the flashing red and black plumage of the bird of Willow Castle splashed across the page. "It's a scarlet tanager!" she said aloud, reading the name on the paper. "And it even has the little olive-brown babies in the nest behind it!"

Papa came to stand over her. "Do you like your gift, childie?"

"Oh, Papa, better than any gift you've ever brought to me!"

She stared at the bird, so alive in the painting that it seemed almost on the point of leaving the paper and fluttering into the room. Just wait till she told Sarah what the bird's name was! Perhaps she could take the picture to Willow Castle and show her secret friend.

"These are very special paintings," Master Macpherson was saying. "They were done by a gentleman whose whole life is now devoted to the study and painting of bird life. His name is John James Audubon."

"Thank you, Papa. It is a lovely present."

Upon her return from school late in the afternoon, she sought out Papa's quill pen on the desk and a sheet of his notepaper. *Dear Secret Friend*, she wrote hastily, *I am able to tell you the name of our castle bird with the broken wing. It is a scarlet tanager. Papa brought me bird pictures from Kingston, and there it was in the midst of them! I think of you often. I shall send a note when I can come again to Papa's mill and Willow Castle.* She read it over, added *to our* before Willow Castle, and then signed it, *Your friend forever, Henry.*

Becky was to go home along the river that very night. When Henrietta passed her in the hall with a tray full of soiled dishes from the dinner table, she said, "Shame on you, Beck! You haven't been doing your work lately. There's dust on Papa's desk."

Becky gave her a startled glance and then smiled. "Yes, miss, I'll see to it at once." And Henrietta knew the note would go on its way. Perhaps there might even be a meeting again on the Saturday if Papa would allow her to accompany him on his rounds.

But Papa had other plans. "Eli can manage well enough at the mill this week, Donald," he told his son in midweek. "He has John Hosey to help him, and I'll be needing your help in the store. There's a big shipment of sugar and hardware coming up the river by schooner, and you can help me stow it away in the store cellars."

"All right, Papa." But Donald grumbled under his breath.

It isn't all right, Henrietta thought. How she longed to go back to the huge willow with Sarah and the bird! Now she would have to wait another whole week.

As it turned out, she had to wait much longer. Papa visited the mill during the week when she was at school. Saturday business

had so increased with the coming of summer weather that he was needed at the store.

The following week, Becky, serving the breakfast after her long morning walk up the river path, pinched Henrietta swiftly on the arm. Henrietta stifled her surprise in her napkin. "Are you choking, child?" Mama said anxiously.

"Oh, no, it's just a piece of bread going down the wrong way."

"I do believe one of my good dinner napkins has gone some wrong way, too," Mama complained. "Rachel and I were counting linen yesterday, and one is missing."

Henrietta excused herself from the table, remembering the little brown bird's nest. She went immediately to the study and opened the secret desk panel. There was the note from Sarah. She read it in her own room at the window. *Dear Friend Forever. I miss you in our castle. Our bird is growing and already hopping about. His wing is mending and he soon will fly. His papa and mama have gone away, so truly he does belong to us now. I am feeling happy to know he is a tanager. Yesterday I was seeing a grand big ship in the river below the falls. Old Lukey has been telling me war tales at the fireside. You are more important to me now than anybody in the whole wide world. I would run far away if you did not come again. When will you come? Your secret friend, Sarah.*

When will you come? Henrietta flung herself on the bed, the note crumpled in her hand. How could she tell when she would go again? The way things were going, it might be all summer before they met. It was a terrible thing that she could not see Sarah when she wished just because Papa did not agree with his neighbours. She sat up slowly, an idea growing. Why could she not follow Becky down the river tonight on her way home? There was every chance that Sarah might be at Willow Castle. It was certainly light enough outside with the coming of summer, and she could be home in bed before the real dark came. When Beck had tucked her into bed, no one ever looked in on her again until morning.

In school all day, she thought of little else. Fanny Briggs poked her several times to bring her attention to Mistress Dier's warnings, and she spilled blue paint all over the black velvet and spoiled her painting. "Like a child in the beginners' class," the teacher complained. "Truly, Miss Henrietta, I do not know when you will ever learn the proper conduct of a young lady."

It was safe conduct to the mill that concerned Henrietta. The moment Becky bade her good-night and left the room, Henrietta was out of bed, tearing madly at the clothes in the sturdy pine wardrobe. The blouse buttons would not do up, and one popped off in her haste. When she heard Becky calling good-night in the kitchen, she tiptoed to the back door. It squeaked a little as she opened it. She waited, but no one came. Papa and Mama were in the drawing room, Papa reading a paper that had come by coach that morning, Mama doing embroidery. She slipped out into the soft air of early summer, watching for Becky to come around from the kitchen door and set off down the river path. But Papa often stood at the drawing room window, his hands behind his back, staring down the river at the village of Napanee as if it were his kingdom. What if he saw her and brought her back? What would happen then? She knew only too well. There would be imprisonment in the house and perhaps in the bedroom for days on end.

You are more important to me now than anybody in the whole wide world. I would run far away if you did not come again. Sarah had said that. Could she risk doing that to Sarah no matter how much she longed to climb the willow and feast her eyes on the view from Sir John Alexander's Tower? If she bided her time, surely there would be more chances for going to the mill. She turned slowly and crept back into the house. Under the covers, she hid her face in the pillow. It was all so disappointing. And yet she knew that no matter how many days passed until the next visit, as long as the notes passed between them, Sarah would be waiting.

June came in, fragrant with the scent of wild roses along the roads and the river. The acrid smell of smoke, on the still days, filled the air as settlers on the fringe of the village cleared new fields and burned the tree stumps. Sounds of summer, bees humming in the hollyhocks, cows lowing with content in summer pasture, horses galloping in the meadow behind the school, all made concentration on sums and the French language more difficult with every passing day. And yet, with the end of the school year in sight, Mistress Dier's zeal to make young ladies of them all became more frantic. Henrietta spent long periods alone in the corner dreaming of Sarah while she wrote "I will guard my tongue against quick answers" a hundred times.

Best of all were the hours after school when she played on the riverbank with Jamie and Alexander, watching the fish lurking deep in the shadows, or staring down the river toward the falls, longing to be there.

"Why do you always look down there, Hen, as if you saw someone coming?" Alexander asked.

"I'm looking at the willows," she said.

Instead of looking, would you help me fish?" Jamie tried to cast his fishing rod cut from a tree branch. "I shall catch a fish for Rachel to cook for dinner."

"Papa says spring is the best time for fishing, Jamie," Henrietta said, "when the salmon come up the river to spawn. Then they lie in droves at the foot of the falls."

"I don't want droves, I just want one," Jamie said. "Help me, please, Hen?"

Alexander brought his boat. "When you've finished with Jamie, will you help me sail my ship, Hen? It goes just like a real schooner."

"I wish it were a real schooner," Henrietta sighed. How splendid it would be to sail down the river past Willow Castle, welcome Sarah aboard and go adventuring with her into the world. All the while she watched the boys play, she imagined Sarah high in the tree waiting for her. Perhaps if Sarah were in Sir John Alexander's Tower, she might see if she waved.

"What are you waving at, Hen?" Alexander asked. "I don't see a thing."

"Oh, look, Alex! Adam has the horses in the pasture. Why don't you and Jamie ask him for a ride?" In a few moments, Adam was leading them round and round the pasture on Mapes.

Then Henrietta heard the carriage wheels on the drive. It was her father with a very important-looking gentleman in the carriage beside him. Master Macpherson called Henrietta.

"Lass, this is Master John Clark who has come to survey Clarkville across the river. You will please bid Rachel prepare tea and have Becky bring it to the drawing room. If Mama is about, tell her I wish her to be there too."

As soon as she found Becky in the storeroom, Henrietta knew something was wrong. Her cheeks, usually rosy, were flushed

scarlet and her eyes glazed. Henrietta stared at her. "What's up, Beck?"

"Oh, miss, I do feel most peculiar! But don't tell your papa, or he will be angry with me for upsetting the household."

Henrietta peeked from behind the drawing room door while Becky carried in the tea. She gasped when Becky stumbled, almost dropping the teapot in the lap of the gentleman guest. Her father was furious. When Adam had taken the guest back to the inn, Papa stormed out to the kitchen.

"'Tis a disgrace when tea cannot be served with propriety in one's own drawing room, and if the servants are thinking too much on their going home and not the task at hand, they will be let out of service."

Becky burst into tears and fled into the pantry. Henrietta plucked at her father's sleeve. "But, Papa . . ."

"This is none of your affair, miss. Please keep out of it!" Master Macpherson raged. "'Tis to be understood that you would take Becky's part since she so often covers up for you. But there will be no more of that. 'Tis time you were put in the care of someone else with a stricter control over you."

The thought filled Henrietta with alarm. Nevertheless she plunged on. "Papa, please do not be so upset. I do believe Becky is ill, and that is why she stumbled. It was not carelessness at all."

Papa stood silent. Then he strode to the pantry. "Girl, are you ill?"

"Oh, master, 'tis nothing. I was not looking where I was going." Becky hid her face in her apron.

Papa removed the apron with a firm hand. "Why, I believe the girl has a fever. Rachel!" he shouted. "Hither at once and put her to bed, and make up some ginger tea."

"Oh, master, it is not right for me to stay here with a sickness," Becky said. "I should like to go home if it's all the same to you."

"Perhaps you are right, Becky," Papa said. "Whatever it is, 'tis best not handed on to the young ones. Donald will take you home in the wagon."

Henrietta's heart leaped. "Oh, Papa, may I go too?"

"What? And catch the fevers from Becky? No, indeed. You'd best stay right away from her."

"But I'll not get close, Papa. She can lie in the back with the

quilts all wrapped about her, and I'll sit up with Donald in the driver's seat. Please, Papa!"

"Oh, very well, run along with you," Papa said. "I expect she's caught the ague that's going about the village. I don't suppose it will light on you if you're out in the Lord's good fresh air."

"Oh, thank you, Papa! You are good to me." She was already on her way to fetch her cloak.

The wagon ride along the river was slow, accompanied by a loud chorus of frogs and crickets. When they went down across the bridge, Henrietta gaped at Willow Castle for a glimpse of Sarah, until Donald's curious gaze forced her to turn away. The castle itself was more beautiful than ever, every leaf in full splendour, branches and foliage as still as a painting in the summer evening. She could hear the night twitterings of the birds and, longing to see their own little captive, wondered if Sarah had kept him safe.

At the sound of the wagon in the lane, Becky's mother ran out of the log cabin. She was just like Becky herself — rosy-cheeked and round-faced — but plumper and grey-haired. She thanked them for bringing Becky home and drew the girl inside, clucking like the hens in Rachel's henhouse.

On the way home as they were approaching the Carscallion farm, Henrietta said, "Don't hurry so quickly, Donald. We shall just have to go to bed when we reach home. Please make it last."

"You know very well, Hen, Papa will be angry if we're late. Besides, I want to stop by Campbell's Rocks to have a look over."

Campbell's Rocks — but that's where the lightning tree was! Perhaps there might be a note waiting. "Whatever do you want to stop there for?" she asked innocently.

"David Hawley told me Squire Campbell had brought some deer down to his pasture, and I want to have a look at them. Davey says there's one buck there with horns as large as a wagon wheel."

"Oh, you know the way that Davey talks." She tried to sound casual. "But stop if you like, I won't say a word." She stared toward the long low farmhouse that sheltered the Carscallion family. There was only a man, perhaps young Master Luke, walking slowly across the barnyard, two pails suspended from a yoke across his shoulders. Far off in the twilight, she could hear the clang of a cowbell.

When they came to the high stone fence of the Campbell property, Donald drew up the horses. "I won't be a minute, sis. Do be good and wait here."

"I'll hop down and stretch my legs," Henrietta said.

The moment he had climbed the slope and scrambled over the stones, she leaped down and raced to the edge of the bush. She found the tree without difficulty, pointing its stark finger to the first faint star. The hiding place was quite clear, a deep gash in the rotting trunk, already covered with a filigree of bittersweet vines. She reached her hand in and found the note. When Donald came loping down the hill, she was back on the wagon seat.

"Well, for once, Davey spoke the truth," he shouted. "I've never seen a bigger buck in my whole life. Solomon Sikes! I wish I could hunt one like that and have its antlers for my room."

"That's a boy for you," Henrietta said primly. "'Tis cruel to kill the wild things, and I hope Papa never lets you have a gun."

"There's no use hoping that, sis. He's promised me one for next year if I behave myself," Donald said.

The moon came up and laid a path of silver on the river as they rode home in silence. A schooner lay at anchor at the wharf, and when they came up beside the bridge, the creak of its rigging mingled with the swish of the water at the falls.

Once in the stable yard, she left Donald to report to Papa and ran to her room. She held the note close to the candle and read, *I do not think you will come to Willow Castle again. Perhaps you do not want me for a friend. The waiting is too long. I go to the castle now to feed our bird, but I do not stay. Our bird is bright with colour. I think one day he will fly away. I am thinking that I shall fly away with him.* There was nothing to show that the note was for Henrietta, and it was unsigned.

She crawled into bed and lay watching the shadows cast by the candle on the ceiling. Hopelessness engulfed her. A friendship was coming to an end, the only real one she had ever had, and no screaming or temper tantrums could do anything to change it.

The Secret of Willow Castle



Chapter 9

The following morning the whole world brightened. Mama poured the cocoa at the breakfast table and called Rachel to refill the cocoa pot. "It will be hard for you until Becky comes back," she said to Rachel. "We shall try not to be too demanding."

"What's being done for the girl?" Papa asked.

"I expect the usual things — spearmint tea or black-currant syrup," Mama said.

"I shall ask Dr. Chamberlain to go down the river to call on her," Papa decided. "He will know best what to do."

"But what if Becky's mother doesn't wish it?" Mama said.

"He will still go. While the girl has duties to perform here, 'tis her business to get back on her feet as soon as possible and return to us." Papa rose. "I'll not lose time. I'll send him down this morning."

"I do wonder, Allan, if Becky gets the proper nourishment in that little cabin," Mistress Macpherson said. "They've not much to be doing with, and 'tis likely mostly soup from a sparse bone that she's fed on."

"Why, then, have Rachel make up some proper broth, beef or chicken, and see that she gets it," Master Macpherson said. "She must have it often, along with some raisin pudding to put the iron in her blood."

Henrietta sat bolt upright. "Oh, Papa, may Donald and I take the broth down to Becky tomorrow?"

"You'll catch the fever from her, child. That would never do," Mama said.

"Mama, I promise I shall take the broth only to the door and say never a word to Becky herself. Please do let me go! Becky has been good to me. 'Tis only right that I should be the one to carry the broth."

Master Macpherson looked pleased. "It makes good sense, lass, though I know it's a fact that you want a ride down the river. Very well, then. It's not too far from the mill to Becky's door. You and Donald may take the nourishment on Saturday and then return to the mill. Donald can give Eli a hand sharpening the millstones."

Mama frowned. "And what's to become of Henrietta while Donald's at the mill?"

"She'll be quite all right playing about. She's been there before." Papa smiled at Henrietta. "It seems to me she owes me a sweeping of sorts."

"Yes, Papa, I remember. I was to sweep up for Master Weekes. You can be sure I shall do it." She wanted to shout for joy. She would see Sarah again and the friendship would be saved. But how was she to send a message to warn of their meeting?

Before she went to bed, she knelt at the window and peered out at the stars. They were radiant in the velvet night sky, giving promise of a fair day for Saturday's adventure. Picturing the delight on Sarah's face when they met, she fell quickly asleep.

She was conscious of the knocking long before she awoke with the noise of it. Someone was trying to find his way into Willow Castle, and she could not open the door. She was groping blindly through the Duke of Napanee's Dungeon when she awoke and found herself tangled in the bedclothes. She sat up. *There had been a knocking — she was sure of it!* It came again, loud and insistent. It was very dark and still, the middle of the night. *Who could it be, there at the door?* Flinging her shawl about her shoulders, she groped her way down the hall. Not quite tall enough to peek out of the window, she ran to get a butter keg from the storeroom to stand on. For a long moment she stared, astonished, at the person on the back step. It was a young man dressed like the clan lords in her father's book of Scottish clans, with a tam on his head, plaid shawl over his shoulder and kilt about his knees. Clutching her nightclothes about her, she ran pell-mell up the stairs.

"Papa! Papa, wake up!" She shook the mound of quilts. "Papa, there's a Scotsman at the door, and I do believe he's come all the way from the Highlands."

"Eh? What's that?" Beneath the tassel on his nightcap, Papa's round face was creased with sleep. "Henrietta, what are you doing out of bed?"

"What's up? What's to do?" Mama said.

"'Tis a gentleman at the door, Papa, in bonnet, shawl and kilt. You should see him, Papa. He's quite ragged as if he had come on a long journey."

Mama and Papa stumbled about the room, Papa shouting in

his loudest voice, "Rachel! Becky! Bring a light! We've guests at the door."

"I'll fetch a taper from the hearth, Papa. Becky is not here, remember?" Henrietta, her eyes now accustomed to the dark, ran swiftly to the kitchen and brought the candles. By this time, the entire household, with the exception of the babies, was astir.

Lucy's frightened face appeared at the nursery door. "Is someone else ill, miss?"

"No, Lucy. It's a stranger at the back door. Papa is going down to let him in."

Master Macpherson, in heavy wool robe and trailing nightshirt, came heavily down the steps and opened the door.

"Ah, Cousin Allan, 'tis mony a weary mile I've trod, and mony a stormy sea I've braved to greet ye at this instant!" The young man fell upon his neck with such enthusiasm that Papa was sent nearly flying.

Papa disentangled himself. "And whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"Why, 'tis your own cousin from Ballychroan. Do ye no remember me?"

"I canna say that I do." Papa's speech took on the Scottish lilt that he fell into only in times of high excitement.

"Alistair Macpherson from Ballychroan? Ye and I played together in the heather when I was none but a wee bit young 'un." The stranger looked so crestfallen that Henrietta sidled up to her father.

"Papa, could you not remember later? Could the gentleman not come in and have some tea?"

"He could well enough." Papa opened the door wide. "Come in, come in. We've no cause to leave even a stranger out on the step in the middle of the night." He led the way to the morning room where Rachel had already stirred up a fire on the hearth and Mama, slightly bewildered, was standing to greet the guest.

"Mother, it's a cousin from Ballychroan," Papa announced. "Have Rachel make him up the bed in the workroom under the eaves, and bring us some tea before she does it." He noticed Henrietta lingering at the door. "Lass, you be off to bed and as quickly as possible. Whatever's to be told will be told at breakfast in the morning. We'll take tea and then off to bed with us all."

Henrietta heard the voices for some time after, but she was too sleepy to listen. Whatever change of plans the young cousin's presence in the household brought, it could not stand in the way of her reunion with Sarah.

She was still sleeping when Rachel shook her in the morning. "Miss Henrietta, you'll miss all the tales if you don't hurry to the table. Do make haste and dress yourself!"

"You will be seated next to Cousin Alistair," Papa commanded after her good-morning curtsey. "He is about to launch on the tale of his travels. Be still and you may learn something from it."

"Yes, Papa." Stealing a look at the young man, she liked what she saw at once. He was taller than Papa and broad-shouldered, though quite thin, whether from hardship or travelling she could not tell. He was considerably older than John Alex, with fair hair and bright blue eyes. His skin shone with scrubbing, and his clothes were clean but almost threadbare.

"I set out in August last from Ballychroan," Alistair Macpherson began, "to visit clansmen in Perthshire."

"Was it your intention to come to Canada as an immigrant?" Papa asked.

"Aye, it was. There was a sadness I left behind in the Highlands, and I longed to come far away to forget it."

Henrietta eyed him curiously.

"I walked through the Highland heather blessed with sunshine, and stopped to gaze on whatever took my fancy." Alistair, trying to be polite, wolfed Rachel's rolls. "At one time, it was a Highland meeting in a glen with caber-tossing, wrestling and sword dances."

"Cousin, do have more bacon. You have come a long way." Mama, fascinated with the young man's hunger, pushed bread, muffins and meat toward him on the table. Whenever her husband wanted something, it was beside the cousin's place and had to be passed.

"I wish I could have seen the wrestling," Donald said.

"Aye, and there was more wrestling at the Lammas Fair that I attended on the way," said Alistair. "And plenty of dances and games, and pedlars selling their wares."

Papa spoke pompously. "It seems to me for a young man bent on an industrious life in a new land, you took a strange number of side trips to get here."

The dislike in his voice made Henrietta wonder. Perhaps the young man, with all his talk of fairs, seemed to Papa too carefree, or was it that he had made the mistake of waking Papa from a sound sleep?

Alistair looked forlorn. "Why, sir, it was all on my way, so I thought I had best see the country while I could. It might be the last time I should ever set foot upon it."

"Did you encounter storms at sea?" Mama asked. "I have heard there are times when the ocean runs with waves like mountains!"

"'Tis true, ma'am. We met with this kind of weather when we had been a month at sea and were nearing the Grand Banks. We were in danger of losing our lives as we slid about the decks! Then we ran into fog, and day and night the ship's horn blew, and the bell rang to warn the smaller fishing vessels that we were approaching."

Henrietta said, "Cousin Alistair, sir, you must have been very happy to see land."

"Aye, that I was, miss. But there was still a long journey ahead by coach and steamer until at last we came to the Thousand Islands. It was thereabouts I made the acquaintance of an actor and his daughter who were touring the country with readings and character sketches from Shakespeare. I may see them again. They said they would be coming to Napanee in the near future."

"Then it is to be hoped you are planning to entertain them under a roof of your own," Papa said sharply. "What plans had you for work here?"

"None as yet, sir. Nor do I know where to look. I was trusting in ye to help me."

"In this country, it is up to every man to help himself," Papa said. "There's work a-plenty about the settlement if you should inquire."

"Papa, John Huffman told me they're looking for help down at the Carscallions," Donald said. "They're planning on clearing another ten acres."

Henrietta sat rigid. How had Donald dared to mention that name!

"Then it seems to me Cousin Alistair should go there," Papa said.

Henrietta was dumbfounded. "Papa, I thought you did not care for the Carscallions."

"'Tis their rascally notions of reform and government that I don't care for," Master Macpherson said. "I shall not let that stand in the way of an honest man's desire to work." He fixed Alistair with a steely gaze. "There is no place for an idle man in this household. If you should find work at the aforementioned place, see to it that you do not become tainted with its political ideals, or you'll not be welcome here again." Papa rose and left the table without another word.

"Oh, dear goodness!" Mistress Macpherson said. "Please do not take offence at my husband, cousin. He fears you have come here to lead a life of idleness, and if there is one thing he cannot bear 'tis an idle man!"

"But how am I to know where to find the farm?" Alistair said. He looked so defeated that Henrietta's heart was touched.

Suddenly the way was clear. "Mama," she said, "why could I not show Cousin Alistair the farm when we have taken the broth to Becky? It's on the way back to the mill."

"Then Papa will be enraged at Alistair for making me late at the mill," Donald said. "He's upset enough now. Let's not make him more so."

"But it's not that long from Carscallions' to the mill. I can walk it by the river path." It was, in fact, a considerable distance down the river, but she hoped Mama was not aware of it. "Donald, you can let us both off, and I'll take Alistair below the ridge and show him the farm gate."

"What do you say, Mama?" Donald asked.

"I am truly in a muddle," Mama said. "But whatever happens, Alistair must find work. Dear child, do take care and stay to the path on your way to the mill. They say there are bears and wolves in the forest nearby!"

"Don't be afraid, Mama," Henrietta said. "There are farms all along the way, and the bears haven't been seen for months. I shall be good, I promise you." She could have danced a jig for joy. If Sarah were not at the mill, surely now she would find her down on the farm.



Chapter 10

Rain fell during the night, but the next morning, by the time Donald and Henrietta were settled in the wagon with Cousin Alistair between them, the sky was clearing and the air hot and humid.

Mama stood outside to see them off. "Do take care, Henrietta, and don't wander from the river path on the way to the mill. And don't spill the broth!" She turned to go, but remembered something else. "You do promise me not to go inside to speak to Becky?"

"Yes, Mama, I promise."

Mama laid a hand on Alistair's arm. "Make yourself agreeable with the Carscallions, dear cousin, and find employment there, or my dear husband will be quite unbearable!"

Alistair fell silent as they rode with the fragrance of June all around them. Henrietta was so happy that she felt like shouting.



"Don't be sad, Cousin Alistair," she said. "I'm sure you will find work."

"It is true what they told me on my way here when I stopped to inquire about your father," Alistair said. "He is truly the Laird of Napanee."

Donald flicked the reins. "Show Papa you're willing to work, Alistair, and you will be one of the family. It was the mention of all those fairs and games you enjoyed on the way here that riled Papa. Fun is all right, but you must work first to enjoy it — that's Papa's motto."

"But he never did listen to the rest of my tale," Alistair said. "Why, I have come through wind and rain and driving snow to get here. I have slept in the forest with the snakes and the squirrels running about my bed of pine boughs and the dew covering my face. I have slept in the fields with the oxen and the kine for company. And it was not easy labour poling my way up the St. Lawrence River in a Durham boat." He looked away over the fields starred with summer bloom. "At any rate, if I'd been a rich mon's

son, I'd not have come here at all or lost what I most wanted."

"What was that?" Henrietta asked.

"My childhood sweetheart. She couldn't be content among the heather with a crook and a plaid and a dog in the cottage. She had to go awa' with the young laird o' the castle."

"Castle?" Henrietta started. "Whose castle?"

"The one nearby my home. But that's all behind me. I've come to Upper Canada to forget. I'll no' speak of it again."

Henrietta tried to cheer him by pointing out her father's red store and the two mills below the falls. He stared at them as they went down the hill and across the bridge. " 'Tis easy to see why your Papa dislikes idleness. He couldna be an idle mon himself with all that to his credit!"

The summer birds, in brilliant plumage, flitted across the river road among the grey boles of the beeches and the blue-green of the spruce as they jogged along. Great piles of lumber lined the banks in wait for schooners to carry them away. Glancing down the stream, they all caught sight of another boat through the trees, the low flat-bottomed type known as Durham. Sitting in it, surrounded by all their worldly possessions, was a family of five. The children, two boys and a girl, were all younger than Henrietta, and the woman was rocking one of them in her arms. The man poling the boat called out, "Good day to you! Would you be so kind as to tell us where we find Squire Allan Macpherson?"

"If you dock your boat at the wharf at the foot of the falls and walk up the hill to Main Street, you'll come upon a red store," Donald shouted. "You'll find him there."

"Why is he asking for your father?" Alistair asked.

"Papa is Crown Lands Agent for these parts," Donald said, "and fixes the deeds for new land."

Overcome by the importance of Master Allan Macpherson, Alistair said no more. Not even Henrietta's cheerful chatter could rouse him from his silence.

"Here's Becky's," Henrietta sang out. "Hand me down the kettle of soup, Donald. I won't be long."

Becky's mother met her at the door with an astonished smile. "How kind of you to bring the broth, child. Becky needs the strength of it, I'm sure."

"How is she, ma'am?" Henrietta peered behind her for a glimpse into the cabin.

"She's coming round. Your good papa sent Dr. Chamberlain to call, and he says she's to lie abed another week or maybe longer. Look now, will you step in and see her?"

Henrietta hesitated. How she would love to see her Becky again, to say nothing of the interior of the log cabin she called home! But she had promised. "No, I had best be on my way now, Mistress Welkin. Do bid my Beck to hurry and get well, please."

When the wagon had rolled to a stop below the Carscallion property, she was the first on the ground. "Hurry, cousin!" she said. "I hear the axes behind the barn. If they need help, now is the time for you to be there."

"Am I to mention your father?"

"Oh, no, don't say a word about him! I heard young Master Luke and Papa at the fair having a dreadful fight all about the government. It would be best if you just told him the story you told us."

Alistair took her hands in his as they came to the stump fence. "My little cousin, I do thank you for your kindness. You are the only one who is willing to help me."

"I'll talk to Papa about you. It will all turn out well, I promise you." She watched him go in at the gate and up the sloping drive. Skirting the main house, he made for the woods beyond the barn where the sound of axes rang out on the hot summer air.

Henrietta looked all about her. The wagon and Donald were disappearing in a cloud of dust down the river road. A cicada buzzed like a saw in a nearby oak, and a splash echoed behind her as a large fish broke the surface of the river. But there was no one in sight, not even in the front yard of the long low Dutch farmhouse with its line of sheds attached to either end. She went in at the gate and made for the fields where the June grasses grew tall and hid her from the view of the front windows. When she came near the strawstack beside the woodshed, she heard Sarah's voice: "Yes, ma'am, I shall bring another armful and fill the box entirely."

She must catch her before she went back into the house! Bending low, she ran up to the end window and peeked in. Sarah was

there, loading her arms with kindling. She nearly dropped it all at the sound of Henrietta's loud whisper.

"Sarah, don't be frightened. I'm at the window."

"Henry!" The little oval face looked up in astonishment.

"Where can I meet you?"

"Wait and I'll come." The child turned and went back through the woodshed to the kitchen door. "The firebox is full, Mistress Carscallion. Is it free I be now until I have to do the baking dishes?"

Henrietta heard a low voice reply. A moment later, Sarah came out the woodshed door. "She says I may go and be back to fetch the noon meal to the men in the bush. Oh, Henry, it is the happiest day of my life to see you again! How did you come?"

As they crept among the hedgerows beyond the house, Henrietta told her of Cousin Alistair. "Perhaps, in time," she said, "if Alistair finds work in the bush with young Master Luke, Papa may even speak to him again, and then you can come right to my house and play with me there."

"Do you really think so?" Sarah said. "I should so much like to see inside the grand house you live in. Mistress Carscallion says it is the most beautiful home in Napanee!"

"Let's not talk about our house now," said Henrietta. "What about our bird and Willow Castle? Can't we go there right away and see them?"

"I wondered if you would first like to climb the limestone ridge with me and see what I have found there," Sarah said.

"What is it?"

"I shall tell you when we get there. Do you dare stay a while?" asked Sarah.

"I don't see why not. I have to tell Donald when I reach the mill, but he's not to know how long it will take me to walk it." Henrietta's eyes shone. "Let's go!"

"We have to pass close by the men who are clearing the bush," Sarah warned. "We must go quietly."

They slipped behind the strawstack and into the hickory bush. Blue harebells and yellow lady's-slippers brushed their skirts as they passed. As hickory mingled with pine and the twilight shade of the bush became deeper, the shouts of men and the sharp ring of axes grew more insistent.

"Follow me," Sarah said softly. "We have to cross the creek." They tramped through marsh marigolds and beds of anemones. Then Sarah stopped suddenly. "You will have to take off your shoes and stockings. My feet are bare."

Henrietta carried them in one hand and lifted her skirts high with the other, the water cooling her feet. The opposite bank of the creek was heavily wooded with oak, beech and maple that mounted the ridge among huge crevices in the bedrock and sometimes sprang from them. Everywhere, the limestone was carpeted with moss and lichens, and water whispered in springs rising from the rock and flowing gently down the escarpment.

"Now," Sarah spoke aloud, "we can talk as we wish. They'll never hear us up here. We will be nearing the place now. 'Tis around this great rock only."

Breathless with heat and haste, Henrietta slithered over the rocks, her feet still bare. They came on top of an enormous boulder and looked down. A dark opening yawned in the rock.

"Is that it?" she asked.

"It is, but that's not all. Look there!"

Above the opening, an outcropping of limestone stood jagged and tall, pointing to the blue vault of the sky.

"Why, Sarah," she said, "it looks like the great desk the rector uses in the schoolroom on the Sabbath!"

"That's just what it is. A pulpit! Old Lukey told me it's the Devil's Pulpit."

"The Devil's Pulpit!" Henrietta hid quickly behind the boulder. "Does the devil live here?"

"I've never seen him at all. And even if he did, he wouldn't mind, surely, if we saw the view." Sarah pulled her up to the "pulpit" and turned her about to gaze down the valley.

"Sarah!" Henrietta exclaimed. "I can see all the way to Mohawk Bay!" Even in the heat haze, the blue waters bound by the green ribbon of the forests glistened in the far distance. "But what about the opening in the rock? Is it a cave?"

"It is that. Would you come in with me?" Sarah started down the slope toward its mouth.

Henrietta glanced from Devil's Pulpit to cave. "Is it safe?"

"There was not a thing in there when I went alone. Take my hand." Sarah grasped Henrietta's hand, and, bending low, they

crawled into the huge crevice.

It took Henrietta several moments to accustom her eyes to the semidarkness. Then she drew back. Strange figures reached toward her from cave ceiling and floor.

"It's only more rocks," Sarah said. "Old Lukey told me how they were made by the drippings of water over hundreds of years. And do you see there? A fox once had his lair here, but he's been gone for some time now."

Astonished, Henrietta stared at her in the darkness. "How do you know all these things?"

"Old Lukey teaches me what to watch for. He is the only one in the house who talks to me." Sarah took her hand again. "If you do not like it here, we shall leave. One day, we shall come again and go far into the cave to see where it goes."

"One day," Henrietta said. Outside in the June sunshine, she breathed deeply. Then with one quick movement, she dragged Sarah again to the shelter of the cave.

"What is it?" Sarah whispered.

"An old woman standing behind the big boulder. She was watching us!" Henrietta trembled.

"Was she bent and old and in clothes even more ragged than mine?"

"Why, yes! How did you know?"

"I have seen her before. Sometimes she follows me," Sarah said.

"But aren't you frightened?" Henrietta still shook at the sight of the stranger with her long disordered hair, black gaping teeth and clothes like tattered flour bags.

"No, somehow I think she likes me," Sarah said. "I would like to know where she lives. Benoni Briggs says she is a witch."

"A witch! Papa never told me there were witches in Napanee."

"Maybe your papa does not know," Sarah said. "Please do not tell him. I would not want anyone to hurt her."

Taking courage, Henrietta peered out. "I think she has gone."

"She will be watching us somewhere. Would you like to see where she is and follow her home?" Sarah's bright birdlike eyes shone in the dark.

"Oh, no! Not now! We'll do that another day. Donald will be waiting for me at the mill, and he will tell Papa if I'm late," Henrietta said. "Please do let us go."

Sarah's voice was low and serious. "I think it would not do for both of us to go to the mill together for fear someone sees us. You go first and I will skip down the back way through the fields and be there in jig-time."

"Will you come with me as far as the gate?" Henrietta said.

"Yes, I will come." Sarah looked beseechingly into her face. "Please, Henry, do not be afraid of the witch. I think she is a lost one like me."

Henrietta's heart lightened as they went over the limestone ridge and were safe among the hickory trees. Then she was on the road, Sarah watching her going from the tall grasses. Even here, with the glare of the June sunlight all around her, she turned quickly now and then to be sure there was no ugly old woman in pursuit. The shouts of the settlers' children playing by the river were comforting. When she approached the mill and heard the rumble of the wheel and the splash of the falls, she felt that she had come home.

Donald was helping Master Weekes to remove the top stone of the grinder as she came running, bursting with gratitude at her safety, into the dusty twilight of the mill shed. Flour and grist flew in all directions, almost blinding her. She stopped, wiping her face on her skirt, and remembered her father's words — "It seems to me she owes me a sweeping of sorts." The gentle talk of the men waiting their turn in the mill yard, Master Weekes's burly figure, her brother's good-natured face, all these were a great strong wall shutting away the world of frightening caves and hideous old women. She had not known there were such people in the world! Papa would protect her from them. She ran quickly toward the miller.

"Good day, Master Weekes," she said. "If you will tell me where to find a broom, I'll sweep the floor for you."

The miller straightened, a smile on his face. "'Tis no work for the daughter of Allan Macpherson. Sit by and watch your brother and me sharpen the grindstone."

"Papa said I should sweep for you, sir. Those were his very orders. Tell him, Donald!"

"It's the truth, Eli," Donald said. "Give her the broom. It would be a real treat to see a girl work for a change." He grinned at Henrietta.

"As you say." Master Weekes brought the large corn broom and hid his amusement as Henrietta struggled to manage it.

It took her half an hour to tidy the room, but even Donald admitted when it was done that Rachel could have served tea without shame in the midst of it. Laughing, Henrietta replaced the broom and ran out of the mill and up the slope to Willow Castle.

Sarah clung to Lord Liam's Stair. "Wherever have you been?"

"I had work to do for Papa. I promised." Henrietta sat on the huge branch, legs curled under her. "Oh, Sarah, it's good to be back again!" Then she gasped. A bird like a scarlet arrow swept past her through the tree. "What was that?"

Sarah laughed. "It's our bird! Have you forgotten? Our scarlet prince! Watch!" She whistled a sweet clear note, and the bird fluttered its black wings to rest on her shoulder.

"Oh, Sarah, he's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen." Henrietta held out her hand, but with a wild cry, the tanager flew off. "Won't he come to me?"

"You must wait a bit, till he gets used to you. He stays in the tree all the time. He's a prince and it's his castle too. He'll come to know you in time, don't fret." Again at her whistle the bird flew back. Henrietta sat quite still as he stared at her saucily from Sarah's shoulder. "Do you see, already he knows you belong here."

Henrietta said sadly, "He belongs more to you than to me. You were the one who fed him and looked after him when I couldn't come."

"But we are secret friends," Sarah said, "and we own Willow Castle together. So the bird is ours together too."

Henrietta caught at her hand. "Sarah, don't ever think I would leave you. There may be times when I can't come or can't even send you a note. But I shall always come back some time, remember that. Don't ever write to me of running away again, do you promise?"

"I promise. As you said, we shall be friends forever."

For an hour, they clambered to Sir John Alexander's Tower and down again, sat on Lord Liam's Stair, imprisoned themselves in the Duke of Napanee's Dungeon and swung their legs from King Lukey's Arch. They were so lost in their world of make-believe that it was several moments before they heard the deep Scottish

voice calling and calling from the mill door. "Henrietta, lass! Are you hereabouts? Come at once!"

"It's Papa! He's here at the mill! Oh, Sarah, I must go."

"Promise me you'll come back. Promise!" Sarah clutched at her skirt.

"I do! I do! Just wait for me."

"And you'll come again to the cave if you can, and see if we can find the witch house?"

Henrietta hesitated. How could she promise that? But Sarah's eyes were pleading. "Oh, yes, anything, Sarah, but wait for me!"

With a leap to the ground, she was off, casting a swift backward glance that caught Sarah standing in the Arch, the scarlet bird on her outstretched hand.

Master Macpherson stood at the mill door talking to Luke Huffman, John's farmer father.

"Good news travels fast," he was saying. "Perhaps, after all, he's not the wastrel I thought him to be. Still, we would be wise to see how long he lasts."

Henrietta dropped Master Huffman a quick curtsey and waited.

"And now, childie," Papa turned to her as Master Huffman's wagon drove off loaded with flour bags. "Master Weekes has told me that you made his floor shine with your broom enough to mirror his face. It would seem to me, lassie, that you should not now be ashamed to look upon your own."

"Yes, Papa." She had no idea what he was talking about. In the evening after dinner, when Papa summoned them all to the drawing room, she found out.

Master Macpherson stood before them, hands behind his back, the heavy gold chain from his watch glistening on his vest. " 'Tis a formal occasion," he declared solemnly, "and one that demands the attention of the entire family."

Jamie tussled with Alexander on the blue velvet couch. "Papa, Alex had my cannon! Make him give it back, Papa!"

"Silence!" Papa roared.

"Do you want me to take them to bed, Papa?" Donald asked.

"I do not. They're of an age when they should know what good behaviour means. When their father speaks, they keep their silence. Henrietta, come and stand before your father."

"Yes, Papa." Her legs began to tremble. Had Papa somehow discovered her friendship with a member of the Carscallion household? But Papa was smiling!

"Do not look so grave, childie. 'Tis a happy occasion." Suddenly he brought his hand from behind his back and, with a little bow, gave her a gold-wrapped parcel.

Henrietta gasped. "My mirror with the castle on it!"

"Aye, you have earned it. You have guarded your tongue of late and shown me today that you can accept responsibility. Let us see that we continue in this way."

"Oh, Papa, thank you so much for giving it back to me." The secret friendship was safe! She felt a great weight lifted from her. And to think she had the mirror back, as beautiful and intriguing as ever. Just wait till she showed Sarah!

Mama was sitting by the hearth. "It would be fitting if you should write to your cousin and tell him you now have the gift he gave you," she suggested with one of her rare smiles.

"Yes, Mama, I shall do it. May I use your desk and pen, please, Papa?"

"You may. I shall see the letter before it is sent," Papa said.

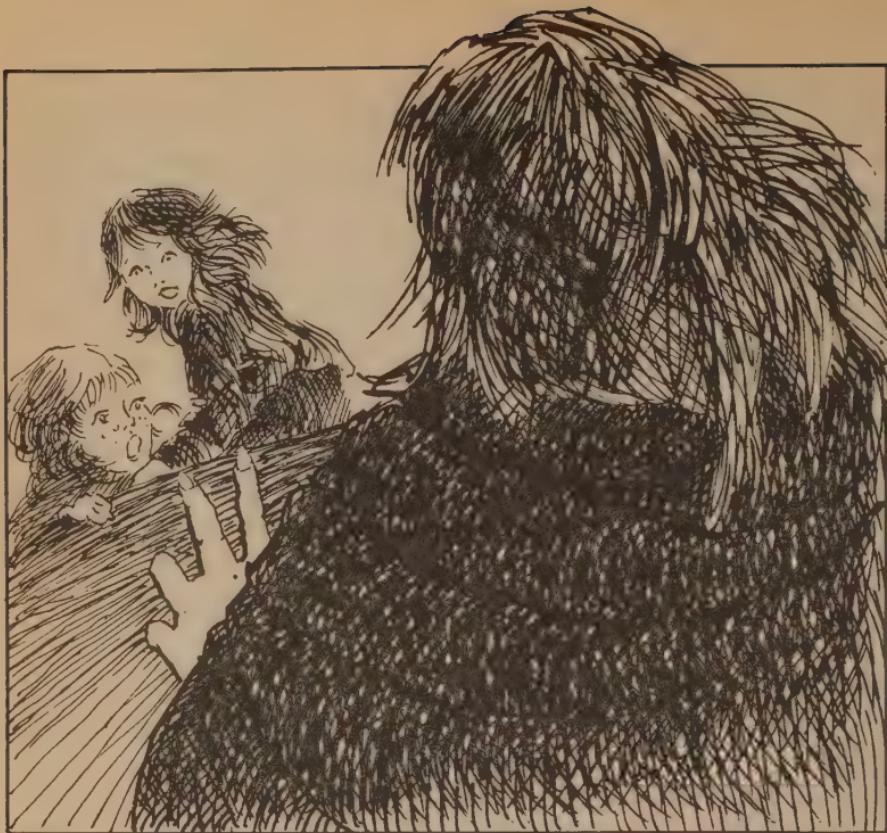
Sitting alone later with the quill in her hand, she gazed out of the window. The yellow briar rose was in full bloom, and she recalled with joy the night she had first seen Sarah standing beside it. Leaning forward, she pressed on the writing surface, and the secret panel slid open. With Becky ill, there were no more secret messages inside waiting to be delivered. Feeling about in the deepest recesses, her hand closed on a crumpled paper. Hurriedly she withdrew it and held it up to the evening light. *Dear Secret Friend*, she read, *I have taken the castle-mirror for a while and only you shall know. Your friend of mystery, H.M.* Her own note written on the night of the skating party! But now she really had a secret friend, and the mirror was rightfully hers. With a rush of happiness, she took up the pen and began to write.

My dear cousin John Alex. It seems many a month since we have seen you. I trust you are in good health and happy in Hallowell. Today is a very important one for me. I have in my hands the mirror with the castle frame that you gave to me. Papa says I am now worthy of it and may keep it in my room.

She gazed out of the window at Adam's flower garden, splendid

with bloom in the summer evening. How she longed to tell John Alex all about Sarah and Willow Castle! But with Papa reading her letter, that was impossible. Besides, there was too much danger in telling another, even dear John Alex. If he let one word slip, the secret would be discovered.

I do thank you with all my heart for my gift. Papa sends his regards to you and Uncle Lowther. Will you come and see us again very soon? Your loving cousin, Henry.



Chapter 11

Within a week, school was finished for the summer. As the girls lined up to curtsey their farewells to Mistress Dier, the summer stretched endlessly ahead for Henrietta, filled with golden days at Willow Castle.

"Swimming every day in the hole above Huffman's farm!" Donald shouted jubilantly as he came in swinging his slate.

Papa had his own ideas about that. "After the work at the mill and the store is done," he said. "Master Weekes can do with a hand almost every day."

"If Donald must go to the mill, may I take more treats to Becky, Mama?" Henrietta asked.

"She's to be back with us next week," Mama said. "Still, I suppose good food never harmed anyone. We'll wait a few days. Now

that you're free of studies, you can give Lucy a hand keeping an eye on the little ones out in the sunshine."

"Yes, Mama." A few days would be time enough. If she behaved herself, Mama might allow her to go on Friday. Somewhere, she would find Sarah waiting.

Looking after the little ones was a good deal of trouble. Alexander and Jamie fought continually over the soldiers and the cannon. Richard insisted on tumbling toward the riverbank until Henrietta filled a large wooden tub from the pantry with water and showed him how to sail Alexander's little schooner upon it. When the boys were all in bed, she sat in the still twilight pushing the ship to and fro with a stick, dreaming it was a real schooner and she was aboard, off on a real adventure. Then she heard the step on the drive. She looked up, astonished, to find Alistair beside her.

"I've come to pay my respects to your father," he said solemnly.

Henrietta leaped to her feet. "I shall find Papa at once for you, Cousin Alistair."

Master Macpherson was in the drawing room. He stood up when Alistair entered and, to Henrietta's surprise, smiled and thrust out his hand.

Alistair said, "I've come to tell ye I'm no as bad as ye thought I was. I ha' me a job wi' the Carscallions, and it's mine as long as I care to keep it."

"You'll not be telling me anything I don't already know, my son," Papa said. "This is a small village, and everything in it comes to my knowledge sooner or later."

"I've come to thank ye for taking me in that first night and to tell ye I'll no' be troubling ye again." Alistair was civil but unsmiling.

"Now, now, lad, there's no need to hold a grudge. You've proved yourself, and you're welcome in this house whenever you want to come. It isn't, after all, as if you were a member of the Carscallion family with all their rascally ideas about rebellion. You're a clansman of mine."

"I canna say a word against the Carscallion family. 'Twould be like biting the hand that feeds me."

"No one is asking you to say a word against them," Papa said. "Just keep your good Scottish common sense when it comes to

politics, and you'll be quite all right. Mama, have Rachel fetch some tea, and Alistair will stay the night with us. Donald and Henrietta can take him down the river in the early morning. Did I not hear something about more nourishment for Becky?"

"Oh, yes, Papa. I'm to take it. Please do stay, Cousin Alistair. You can come with us all the way." Such a turn of events Henrietta had not expected. With Alistair along, anything was possible!

Papa's amicable manner, together with the sudden sound of thunder rolling in from the west, helped Alistair to make up his mind. He was soon enjoying the attention of all the family as he took tea in the drawing room.

The storm that rumbled over the village during the night ended the heat and brought clear skies and a strong wind in the morning. But the river road, sheltered by towering pines and oaks, was calm.

"Say, sis," said Donald, as the wagon mounted the hill toward Campbell's Rocks, "don't say a word to Papa if I stop for a minute by Campbell's Wharf. Charlie and John are fishing there this morning, and I want to see a new fancy hook that John's father bought for him in York."

Henrietta could not believe her good fortune. "Why don't Alistair and I walk the rest of the way to Becky's, Donald? It's only a step or two farther. Alistair can see me to the door, and then I'll come back to the mill as I did the last time."

"Would you do that? Oh, Hen, I'll do something for you some day if you will. It might even give me time to cast off the wharf once without being late to help old Eli." Donald leaped to the ground. "Don't wander into the bush, now." He tethered the horse hastily to a nearby oak and made off down the hill.

"Will you always work for young Master Luke, Alistair?" Henrietta asked as they tramped the road together.

"'Tis not what I had planned," Alistair said soberly. "I shall work and save until I have enough by me to start out on my own. Then I shall ask for a grant of land and begin to farm for myself. All the time I am with the Carscallions, I shall watch and listen to learn as much as I can. Perhaps, somewhere, there's a good woman who'll be my wife and help me build a new life here in a new country."

To Henrietta's surprise, Becky was sitting out of the wind in the shelter of the cabin, her pale face upturned to the sun.

"Oh, Beck!" Henrietta ran across the field amid the stumps.
"You're up and better!"

Becky tried to stand. "Miss Henrietta!"

"Don't get up. This is my Cousin Alistair from the Highlands of Scotland, and he's been taken on at the Carscallion farm. Oh, Beck, you do look so pale and thin! Mama has sent you some beef pie and egg custard pudding. You're to eat it all up like a good girl."

"I will, miss. Truly I don't know how to thank you for your kindnesses to me." Becky's wide blue eyes filled with tears.

"Beck, you mustn't cry. You must hurry and get well as soon as possible so we can be together again. I do have so much to tell you! And I miss you more than I can say."

Alistair shifted anxiously from one foot to the other. "Cousin Henrietta, I shall be late for work if we don't hurry."

"I'll take the food to the house."

Becky's mother received it with a grateful smile. Henrietta bade Becky good-bye and matched her stride to Alistair's as they went down the river road.

When Alistair had gone up the farm lane and was well on his way to the barn, Henrietta mounted the slope and clambered over the rail fence. Her heart beat furiously at a sudden rustle in the grasses. Where did it come from? She flung herself down, her face touching the moist fragrant earth.

"Henry, I'm here, across the fence. Don't go farther." It was Sarah, and the whisper was behind her.

She crawled back to the fence and looked over. Sarah was sitting, laughing, on the edge of the slope that led to the road. "I was on my way to Willow Castle," she said. "I was so sure you would come this morning! Now we can go and explore the cave together, and perhaps the witch's house."

Henrietta's heart pounded. "Do we really have to go today, Sarah?"

"You may not have the chance to be so close to the ridge again," Sarah said, disappointed. "I have wanted you to come with me there for so long. It is an adventure to share with a secret friend."

Henrietta, taking a deep breath, reached out her hand. "Come along, then," she said. "If we're together, nothing can harm us."

The trees shone green with foliage washed clean by the night's rain. The glades were loud with birdsong and the chattering of

squirrels and chipmunks. As they mounted the rocky hill across the creek, they found the irregular face of the stone still damp and slippery and made more so by the abundance of lichens. When they came up around the boulder, Henrietta stood still and looked around. There was no one in sight. Only the magnificent valley lay below them, river and forest lustrous in the sun. By contrast, the entrance to the cave appeared dark and dreadful, the Devil's Pulpit above it a huge warning finger.

Without hesitation, Sarah went down into the cave. "Come along, Henry," she called. "We've no time to waste, or they'll be wondering about you back at the mill."

Picking her way among the rocks, Henrietta bent to enter the cave. Darkness struck her like a blow in the face, but once her eyes had grown accustomed to the lack of light, she made out again the strange shapes looming from floor and ceiling.

"'Tis wet down here." Sarah's whisper echoed from the low-slung roof. "There must be springs running inside the cave."

"Do we have to go farther, Sarah? There seems to be nothing ahead but rock and blackness."

"Don't you see? The cave makes a twist like a long hallway. Just hold tightly to my hand," Sarah said. "You'll be safe."

As they left the cave's mouth behind them, they had to feel their way step by step in the darkness. When Henrietta's foot was suddenly soaked with water, ice-cold and shocking, she screamed. The sound rebounding from the walls was as terrifying as the sudden dunking. Sarah flung an arm about her shoulders. "We'll go back, Henry. You mustn't be so frightened."

"Wait a minute!" Henrietta stared ahead. "Look up there, it's a light shining!"

"It's sunlight!" Sarah said. "We're coming to the end. Let's hurry and see!"

They ran, slipping and stumbling over the rock-strewn floor, until they reached the source of the light, a narrow opening in the cave's roof reaching to the cliff above.

"We can climb it," Sarah said happily. "You'll have to be careful where you put your feet. I'll go first and show you the way." She scrambled up the limestone ledges like a little wild animal, her bare feet catching the toeholds in the rock. "It's easy." The pale oval face smiled down at her. "Come now, I'll watch you."

Henrietta, left alone at the bottom of the cave, felt sudden panic. But reassured by Sarah's calm, she put one foot after the other, finding the ledges firm and sure. She was almost at the top when her foot slipped, and she slithered part way down the rock, catching her arm on a jagged projection. She cried out with pain. In an instant, Sarah, inside again, reached out a hand to help her. Choking back her sobs, Henrietta crawled out onto the lichen-covered table of rock.

Sarah flung her arm about her. "There now, don't cry, my wee colleen! 'Tis all my fault for having brought you here in the first place."

"Is there a hurt old Mother Martha can mend?"

At the sound of the rasping voice, they whirled. Behind them stood the witch pointing a long bony finger. Atop the rock, sheltered by a dark glade of trees, was a tumbledown shack, door gaping wide. It was undoubtedly the witch's house.

Henrietta, weak with fear and hurt, could not move. She hid her face against Sarah's ragged skirt.

"She won't hurt us," Sarah whispered. "I have heard something about her. I shall tell you later. But don't be afraid of her." She stood up and curtseyed. "Please, ma'am, my friend has hurt her arm on the rock. 'Tis all red and swollen."

The old woman moved slowly to the door of the shack. "Come with me," she said.

"Come along. It won't do to disobey her." Sarah took Henrietta's hand.

The door of the little house was no protection against the weather. It hung crazily on one leather thong. Henrietta could see where the old woman had patched the cracks in the walls with large pieces of birch bark. The inside of the cabin was a wild disarray of pots, kettles and wooden tubs, with two broken chairs leaning tipsily before the hearth. Even in the warmth of the June day, fire burned in the fireplace, and over it, a cauldron, spitting and bubbling, filled the cluttered room with a strong, offensive odour. Remembering tales of witches and brews, Henrietta drew back in fright.

"It's herbs she's brewing," Sarah said. "She is clever with medicines, please do believe me."

Bunches of herbs of all shapes and sizes hung drying from the

smoke-stained rafters: spikenard and catnip, tansy and cherry-bark, wormwood and burdock, and a dozen more that Henrietta had never before seen.

The woman went stooping to a shelf laden with ancient pottery jars and lifted one to the crude lopsided table. "Smartweed for swelling," she cackled, and taking a large dollop of something from the jar, she laid it on Henrietta's swollen arm. Henrietta could have cried out with the stinging. Then suddenly the hurt was relieved and a pleasant soothing took its place. The woman grinned toothlessly at Henrietta. "I'll make it fast for you, little one." She fetched a large burdock leaf from a tub in the corner and tied it around the wet weeds on the arm. Without another word, she beckoned them to follow her out the door. Going down into the glade of pines, they came to a well-worn path.

"It's the way back," Sarah whispered. "She's showing us how to go."

Resisting her urge to bolt into the forest, Henrietta turned to face the old woman. She curtseyed. "I do thank you," she said. "You have made my arm better."

The woman stared at her, a strange look in her squinting eyes. Sarah clasped Henrietta's hand and set forth over the rocks, with a smile and a wave for the witch behind her.

"What did I tell you?" she said, when the pine trunks had hidden her from sight. "She may be a witch, but she is a good one. Old Lukey was right."

Henrietta breathed easily for the first time since they had entered the cave. "Did Old Lukey tell you about her, then?"

"He did. He said she'd come up the river by one of the Durham boats a year or so ago. A story went about that her husband and children had all died of the cholera in another place, and she became a madwoman because of it. That is why she lives here alone."

Henrietta shivered. "How does she manage to get enough to eat up here on the rocks?"

"Old Lukey says she eats wild roots and flowers, and people pay her with food for her herb medicines. She has a magic with them, he says, that makes her a kind of witch." Sarah went slowly down the path. "Did I not tell you she was a lost one like me?"

They came to the trail that led to the creek and splashed across to the hickory woods. "You called me something when I was hurt,

Sarah," Henrietta said. "It was 'my wee colleen.' Where did you hear that?"

"I do not know. It is just something I remember. Someone called me that once long ago in a place far away." A smile flashed suddenly across Sarah's face. "We have had an adventure today, Henry, a secret one! Shall we hurry to Willow Castle now and find our bird?"

He was waiting for them, fluttering with pleasure in King Lueky's Arch. "I shall have to go and tell Donald I am here," Henrietta said. "I'll hold my arm behind my back, and then he won't see it."

She ran down the hill, passed a large handsome wagon in the lane, and went in at the mill door. Standing in the dusk of the grist room talking to Eli Weekes was Master Richard Lowe, and behind him, silent and waiting, his black slave.

"Good day, Miss Henrietta," Master Weekes called. "Donald has gone up to the store to carry a message from Master Lowe. He'll be back shortly if you're wanting him."

Taken by surprise, Henrietta found herself staring at the black man. "Oh, no. Please tell him I'm playing by the pond and I'll come when he calls."

"Master Lowe has some happy news for young folks," Master Weekes smiled. "He tells me a circus owner has been looking for your papa. He wants permission to bring the circus to the fairgrounds."

Henrietta gaped at him. "A circus!"

"Aye, 'tis to be hoped your papa allows them to come."

"Oh, Master Weekes, he must!" Henrietta flew up the hill to the shelter of the willow. "Sarah!" she gasped. "I've the most wonderful news! A circus is coming to the fairgrounds!"

"A circus?" Sarah eyed her, puzzled.

"Have you never heard of one? Donald told me another came when he was much younger. There are men walking on wires, horsemen with their mounts trained almost like humans. And animals, dozens of them, all walking and performing. It will be like the Napanee Fair, only better!"

"Perhaps young Master Luke will let James take me there," Sarah said. "Do you think if he did, we could meet?"

"We could stand close and not talk. It would be a terrible thing

if someone discovered our secret. Papa would not hear of our being friends." Henrietta stretched out her hand and the tanager came to light upon it. "We can meet in silence, Sarah. Remember to look out for me."

Sarah put her finger to her lips. "There's someone beneath the tree," she whispered. "Don't say another word!"

Henrietta parted the leaves and looked down. Below, standing at the edge of the millpond, was the tall black man staring at the wild ducks skimming the water. As he watched, he turned slowly, then lifted his head and looked her full in the face. For a moment, only the big dark eyes gazed at her. Then the man swung about and went back down the hill.

"He knows we're here," Henrietta said. "Do you think he heard our plans?"

"I don't think so," Sarah said, troubled. "Perhaps he has secrets too, and he won't tell ours."

"Perhaps." Henrietta watched him until he turned in at the mill door. "Sarah, I think he is a good man," she said. "I once heard him sing a song of great sadness." Even now if she closed her eyes, she heard it again. "I wish he did not have to be a slave. He reminds me a little of the witch on the rocks."

"Is your arm better?" Sarah asked.

Henrietta removed the burdock leaf. "Yes, look here. The swelling has gone down, and there's just a graze. She does know what to do, Sarah, it's true."

"She is so hungry and thin-looking," Sarah said. "Perhaps one day we could take her something to eat."

Henrietta wondered if she would ever have the courage to go there again. "I could save some cakes from my plate, or a piece of applesauce loaf."

"What kind of cakes would you be thinking of?" Sarah said.

"Rachel makes some with maple syrup and ices them with brown-sugar frosting. Do you think she would like them?"

"I know I would," said Sarah. "Sometimes Mistress Carscallion makes little cakes, but there are never any left over for me. The boys eat them all. Once I was given one to myself, and James took it from me."

"Did you not tell on him?" Henrietta said.

"How could I? When I have something the boys want, they tell

me I am there only if I behave myself and while it suits their papa to keep me." She looked at Henrietta with solemn eyes. "Oh, Henry, I would not want to be sent away now! Not now I have a friend!"

"You shall never go! Don't even think of it!" Henrietta almost cried out in her dismay. "The circus is coming, Sarah, and you and I shall meet there and enjoy it together."

The Secret of Willow Castle



Chapter 12

When Henrietta returned home with Donald in mid-afternoon, she flew to the kitchen. "Rachel!" she shouted. "The most wonderful thing is going to happen! A real circus right on the fairgrounds across the river — Papa has given his permission for it — just imagine, a whole field given over to fun!" *And Sarah there to see it with me*, she thought happily.

"A circus! I think there's more than young ones will want to see that!" Rachel said. She was stirring something in a large cauldron at the hearth.

Donald came into the kitchen, sniffing. "Strawberry preserves."

"May I taste, Rachel?" Henrietta said.

Rachel lifted the big wooden spoon. "Mind you don't burn yourself."

"Mmm." Henrietta smacked her lips. "It's the best you've ever made. I wish Beck could be here to have some."

Rachel smiled. "Your mama has good news. Dr. Chamberlain came today and said your Becky will be able to come back next week if things go well, though her duties must be light for a while."

"When will she come?" Henrietta asked.

"We'll have to wait and see. Now, if you've a mind to it, you could stir the preserves for me while you're standing about." As Henrietta reached out to take the long-handled spoon, Rachel caught sight of her arm. "Why, miss, that's a nasty graze. Whatever did you do to your arm?"

Hastily Henrietta dropped it. "'Tis nothing really, Rachel. I had a little fall. Don't breathe a word to Mama. She worries so if one of us is hurt."

Rachel smiled and said nothing.

Later, beneath the thin summer coverlet, Henrietta considered the events of the day. It had been one of the strangest and most exciting she had ever lived. First the witch, then the black man, and last of all, news of the circus. What could she take to the witch-woman, and how was she to leave it in the shack without being seen? Currant buns would be good. She could take them from her own plate and hide them up her sleeve. How she would love to

take along some of Rachel's preserves to spread on the buns! But that was impossible. As she lay thinking, the dark untidy recesses of the shack came back to her, and the scent of the cauldron's brew. Along with these, there was a great black tunnel leading from the witch's house, and she was trying to run along it, slipping and sliding hopelessly over the stones. The witch came closer and closer, the eyes two gleaming slits in the long wrinkled face, the crooked bony finger reaching out for her. She awoke with a scream and sat up, shaking.

Rachel hastened in. "What is it, miss? Are you frightened?"

Henrietta smiled, comforted. "Stay for a bit, Rachel, until I go to sleep again. I was having bad dreams."

"It's just as well I come down to see if the wax was set on my preserves, miss, or I wouldn't have heard you." Rachel sat on the bed and crooned a lullaby.

As Rachel hummed, Henrietta could feel her eyes closing. "Rachel," she said sleepily, "what is the cholera?"

Rachel drew a sharp breath. "Miss, why do you ask that question?"

"I heard of someone's having it, that's all, and I wondered what it was like."

Rachel shook her awake. "Miss Henrietta, 'tis an illness. You've not been near anyone who has it, have you?"

"Oh, no, Rachel, of course I haven't. It all happened a long while ago." She thought of Sarah's mother and the witch-woman's family. "Is it a bad illness, Rachel?"

"Dreadful, miss. It's going about the countryside down east even now. Don't breathe a word to your dear mama, or you'll have her so upset there'll be no living with her."

"I won't Rachel, I promise." Rachel began to sing again, and in a moment Henrietta was asleep.

Neither of them mentioned their midnight conversation again, although Henrietta was aware of Rachel's searching glances. On Monday, Becky, still pale but smiling, came back to the household, brought by her father in a rickety little wagon. Henrietta followed her about the house like a shadow, sharing the events of her absence. The mirror with the castle came first, and Becky helped her to polish the dark wood until the secret recesses glowed.

"Where will you hang it, miss?" she asked.

"I shan't hang it anywhere just yet, Beck," Henrietta said. "I want to carry it about to show people, now that it's my own again." *Especially Sarah*, she thought, *as soon as I can go to Willow Castle again*. "Becky," she added in a whisper, "you'll be able to carry the little notes for me now you're back, won't you?"

"Not for a while, miss," said Becky. "Dr. Chamberlain has told your papa that I'm not to take the long walk up the river for at least a week." She looked at Henrietta with curiosity. "I do hope these notes don't lead you to mischief, miss, whoever they're sent to."

"It's nothing wrong, Beck, I promise you, so don't breathe a word about them. But if you can't take the notes for a while, what am I going to do about the circus?"

"If you mean, miss, how are you going to let somebody know, I fancy she knows already. There's big red and white notices telling about the Grand Menagerie all over the village. Why, they're posted to your own papa's mill."

Henrietta followed her to the kitchen and curled up on the window seat. "What do they say, Beck? Please tell me everything."

"They says what's going to be at the circus, miss. Lions and tigers and elephants — ladies riding on horseback — and best of all, miss, the biggest dancing bear in the world!"

Henrietta leaned on the table where Becky was polishing a copper kettle. She peered up into her face. "Beck, is Peter Fairfield coming to the circus?"

Becky's duster flew. "Whatever made you ask that, miss?"

"Oh, I just wondered."

Becky heard Rachel coming down the stairs. "Ssh, miss, don't speak any more about it. Your mama wants the kitchen moved down to the cellars now for the heat of the summer. Rachel and me will be busy for the afternoon."

"I'll help," said Henrietta. "What has to go down?"

"All the cooking pots and skillets, the cauldrons, the irons, the blue and white kitchen dishes. Don't get your frock untidy, miss, or your mama will be angry."

The migration of the kitchen to the deep, cool depths of the cellars was a sure token that midsummer had arrived. Down there, among the packed earthen floors and thick stone walls, the baking and cooking were done in huge stone fireplaces that did not affect

the temperature in the upper floors of the house. On a hot day, there was nothing Henrietta loved more than to prowl in these deep-set summer kitchens among the preserves, glowing green and yellow on the storage shelves, or the big dusty chests hidden in the corners.

Tuesday morning found her not in the cellar but on the river-bank in front of the house looking across to the fairgrounds.

"When the circus wagons come," she told Donald, "I want to be the first to see them."

"They won't likely be here till late afternoon," Donald said. "They gave a show up in Newburgh yesterday, and they have to pack up." He glanced at the sky, threatening with low cloud. "We'll be lucky if it doesn't rain and spoil it all."

"It can't do that!" Henrietta said. "It just has to be good weather!"

Donald grinned. "You can tell everybody else what to do, sis, but you can't tell the weather. It won't do a thing you say."

The circus wagons were welcomed with a roll of thunder like drums in the late afternoon. Henrietta scuttled into the house and from the workroom window under the eaves saw the wagoners, trainers and animals caught in a downpour. "Look at them, Alex," she shouted. "They're running in all directions!"

Her brother squeezed in beside her. "Let me see! Let me see, Hen! I want to see the elephant!"

But only vague shapes could be seen through the rain. Bulky masses of uncertain colour mingled with the running grey figures of men, and yards of bedraggled and multihued bunting dropped from cages and wagons. However, when Adam came up the stairs to tell them Becky wanted them to tidy up for dinner, the rain had stopped and the air was very still and hot.

Wednesday dawned with a clear blue sky, and the sun, beating down on the fairgrounds, dried up the puddles and welcomed the first arrivals in the early afternoon. Henrietta and Becky were among them, Adam following with the young boys in the small cart. Long before they arrived at the gate, Henrietta could hear the whining and shuffling of the animals in the semicircle made by the circus wagons and cages. A number of crude benches had been lined up opposite the performing platform. Henrietta dragged Becky to a front-row seat, her eyes searching the crowd.

Donald arrived arm in arm with John Huffman and Charlie McGreer. Then Henrietta saw the tall Carscallion boy and behind him Sarah. After a flurry of discussion between the two, something changed hands, and Sarah flew across the field. Without a word or a glance, she sat down beside Henrietta. James Carscallion followed, puzzled, then shrugged his shoulders and gave his attention to the show.

With a clarion call of trumpets and a burst of drums, the circus began. A huge elephant, enormous ears flapping, picked up with his trunk a little man clothed all in red silk and dropped him on his own vast grey back. The man began to stand on his head and do gymnastic tricks. Sarah clapped her hands and stole a swift glance at Henrietta. Henrietta was waiting. She gave a quick wink, then turned to see the beautiful lady in pink satin dancing upon the back of a splendid dapple-grey pony. Henrietta cheered. Prancing horse and dancing rider were followed in swift succession by a prowling tiger who leaped on a rolling barrel, a lion who jumped through a hoop, and a family of monkeys who swung from trapezes onto a leopard's back and rode in style around the arena.

A clown came by selling nutmeats and sweets. Henrietta bought a large bag and wondered how she could give some to Sarah. She was astonished when Becky, helping herself from the proffered bag, whispered, "Miss, that little thing sitting next to you has none. Why don't you share with her? Your papa likes you to think of others, you know."

Henrietta thrust the bag at Sarah. "Do have some of my sweets," she said. "They're barley sugar and peppermint balls."

Sarah found it hard to hide a knowing smile. "Thank you, miss. I do so love candy." Bending forward to take it, she added in a whisper, "Old Lukey gave me a penny to buy some, but I had to give it to James to make him come and sit here."

Their preoccupation with one another was cut short by Becky's shout. "Look, miss, it's the bear! He's coming out dancing a jig on his hind feet!"

The audience rose as one to gape, pushing closer to the remarkable animal and his trainer. The circus owner ran along the edge of the crowd. "Keep to your seats!" he shouted. "This animal is wild when excited."

The crowd was too entranced to listen. The small children pushed their way to the front screaming with delight. Henrietta caught a sudden glimpse of her father standing back near the gate and chatting with Master Lowe. He, like all the rest, roared his concern when the bear, seeing the rim of the crowd closing in upon him, dropped to all fours and began to run. The crowd doubled back upon itself, a turmoil of screaming, thrashing townsfolk. Fathers swept their children to their shoulders and raced for the gate. Old people were left defenceless as the throng surged around them. Becky, pushed behind the benches, fell to the ground. Trying to straighten her sunbonnet, she rose and groped for Henrietta. But Henrietta's first thought had been for Sarah. She clung to the small white hand as if somehow she alone could prevent the bear from devouring her friend.

"Look there!" Sarah shrieked. "The bear's running the other way now, toward the river."

The cry was taken up, and the crowd turned to gawk at the animal lumbering down the riverbank toward the water. The circus owner and all the other attendants raced after him. With a resounding splash, the bear leaped into the river and, borne by the current, began to swim downstream.

On the shore, his trainer, a short dark-skinned man in a purple suit, waved his arms wildly, screaming words in a foreign tongue.

"He's pointing to the falls!" Henrietta shouted. "If the bear goes down the river, he'll go over!"

Pushing and shoving, the crowd surged toward the riverbank. Becky grabbed at Henrietta's arm. "Come out of it, miss. You'll be hurt."

"Oh, no, Beck. I must watch! Don't take me away!" Seeing the bench behind her, she stood on it, dragging Sarah with her. "Look, look!" she shouted. "Master Lowe's slave is going into the river. He's making the bear turn back to shore! The black man has saved the bear, do you hear me?" She pumped Sarah's hand up and down in excitement. Then, realizing that Becky was near, she dropped it suddenly and turned to her. "Beck, what do you think of that? The bear has been saved, and it was all the slave's doing!"

Becky, looking faint, sat down heavily on the bench. "Miss, 'tis a brave man to face a bear in the river. They should give him a medal for attempting it." She mopped her face with her hankie.

"Truly, miss, this day has been more than I can stand. I do feel weak."

"I shall help you home, Beck, or get Adam to take us with the boys in the wagon." Henrietta smiled across the sea of faces at Sarah. "Never have I seen such an exciting thing happen in my life before!" Like all the others, she stared at the slave who came dripping from the river while the trainer cracked his whip and goaded the great sopping bear into his cage. "Becky, the black man looks as if he feels sorry for the bear the way he stares at it. Do you think he did not want to save it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, miss," Becky said. "All I know is your dear mama will be in a terrible fright when she hears what happened. Here comes your papa now, looking for you."

They enjoyed the rest of the performance with Mr. Macpherson standing over them, and Sarah, her black eyes wide, gazed up at him in awe. The parade of animals that followed, the lions, tigers and lumbering camel, went through their motions listlessly as if nothing could quite match the spectacle of a bear going downriver to the falls and a huge black man rescuing him from disaster.

With a final roll on the drums, the performance came to an end, and the crowd began to move off through the gate. As she followed her father, Henrietta reached out in the crush and touched Sarah. A swift secret smile passed between them.

"Come along, miss," Becky said. "Your papa wants to get you home at once. This has been a day we're not liable to forget, any one of us!"

"I know I never shall," Henrietta said. She watched Sarah trying to keep up to James Carscallion on his way down the river road. For the first time, they had shared a wonderful adventure with the whole village around them, and no one had known.



Chapter 13

Henrietta sat up in bed listening. Her room was still breathless with heat even in the early July dawn. The sound came again — Adam singing an old English ballad in the barn. Quickly she dressed herself and slipped outside.

“Good morning, Adam. Is it cooler out here?”

“Not much, miss,” Adam said. “It’s been a bad night. We’ll get a big storm out of this, you mark my words.”

Henrietta patted Bonnie Prince’s smooth brown flank. “Adam, may I let the horses out of their stalls and into the pasture?”

“Yes, miss. That would be a help to me.”

The horses rubbed their noses against her body as she led them out of the barn. She watched them kick up their heels and dash away toward the pine bush, and then she came back into the barn where Adam was already cleaning out their stalls.



"Horses like to be free, don't they, Adam?"

"All things likes to be free, miss," Adam said. "Animals isn't too much different from humans when it comes to that."

She sat on Adam's high stool. "Adam," she said, "are slaves always black?"

"Not always, miss. There has been some white ones. Why, my own grandsire told me tales of white slaves taken in time of war when sailors raided the coasts."

"And do they have slaves in England where you come from?"

"Well, now, Miss Henrietta," Adam rubbed his white whiskers, "I do remember there was a great lord once, lived by my home in Staffordshire. He had a little black boy he'd brought home from his travels in Africa. I see by the papers, miss, they're tryin' to pass laws to forbid such things back home."

"Will we have those laws here too, Adam, if the government passes them?" Henrietta asked.

"I don't know, I'm sure, miss. You'd best ask your papa about that. He knows everything about the government." Adam carried

the stable refuse out to the dung heap in the yard.

Henrietta sat staring about Adam's room. There was something comforting in its simplicity. Saddle and bridle on the wall, dark homespun coverlet on the narrow rope bed in the corner, low fat candle squatting on the washstand: all bespoke Adam's independence, his freedom. She wondered where the black man slept at Master Lowe's. Would he have a room like Adam's, free to make his own comfort, or would he sleep on the floor beside his master's bed, ready in an instant to do his bidding?

Donald came to call her in to breakfast. "Hey there, Hen," he said. "Guess what? There's to be a barn raising down the river up behind McGreer's farm. New folks came to settle a while ago, and Papa says I'm to lend a hand with the raising."

"That's your first time, isn't it, Donald?" Henrietta said. "Will you be allowed to stay for the barn dance after the work?"

"That's just the point. Papa says I can stay, but I've never danced yet." Donald looked down at his big feet. "Is it easy, Hen?"

"Of course it is. We have to take dancing at school. Mistress Dier says it's all part of learning to be a young lady. I'll help you if you like. We can come here up in the loft where no one can see us."

Donald grinned. "Would you really, sis?"

"It'll be fun and something to do. What's the name of the people you're helping?"

"Hawkins. They're English folk, quite well-to-do. They came up the river from Quinte in a Durham boat. Papa got acquainted with them when they came to get the deed for their land."

Suddenly Henrietta remembered the family of five stopping to inquire for her father on the day that she and Alistair were going down the river road. An idea began to take shape in her mind.

"Donald," she said, "if you're to be away with the Hawkins family all day, who's to help Papa in the store? Tomorrow's Saturday, and there will be lots of business."

"That I don't know, sis. He spoke of having John Hosey come over from the mill."

"Why do that?" Henrietta said. "Donald, I could go with him and wait on the customers."

Donald looked doubtful. "Do you think he'd allow it?"

"If he allowed me to sweep the mill floor, why wouldn't he allow

me to work behind the counter?" she said. "You suggest it to him."

"Oh, all right, sis," Donald said. "Come along now. Rachel is shouting for us from the kitchen door. We're late."

At breakfast, Rachel had just set a bowl of steaming oatmeal before Papa when he said, "You must pack me a lunch on Saturday, Rachel. I'll be too busy to come home for a meal."

"It's Donald I worry about, Allan," Mama said, "down the river with all those big rough men. The saints alone know what dreadful language he might hear or what evil he might fall into at the barn party later."

"Mother, Donald will meet vice everywhere in life," Papa said. "At fifteen, he must learn to recognize it and stand up against it."

"I must learn many things too, Papa," Henrietta said innocently.

"Yes, Papa," Donald broke in. "Hen is getting very big now herself. Had you thought of having her help you in the store while I'm down the river?"

Silence fell upon the table. Henrietta, about to speak, winced at a swift kick from Donald. She buttered her muffin instead.

"Well, now," Papa said, "the idea may have some merit. The child has grown in independence with Becky's absence from the household, I can see that. How about it, lass? Would you like to come with me on Saturday and work in the store for the entire day?"

Henrietta half rose in her chair. "Papa, I would like nothing better! I would do everything I was told. Truly I would!"

"The matter is settled, then," Papa said. He roared into the kitchen. "Becky, see that your young mistress is dressed and ready to accompany me to the store tomorrow at seven o'clock and not a minute later."

The morning, after a brief night storm, was fresh and cool, with a strong wind blowing from the northwest. Henrietta, a light shawl about her shoulders and her blue calico sunbonnet tied under her chin, looked all about her as she sat beside her father on the wagon seat. The river glistened green in the sunshine. Along the river road came settlers on foot or by wagon to conduct Saturday business in the village. Many of them bowed and waved to Master Macpherson. For Henrietta, the day's delight was marred only by Sarah's not knowing she would be at the store.

When they opened the store door, they were met by the pungent aromas of coffee and vinegar, spices and molasses, brown sugar and tobacco. The last hung in shrivelled bark-brown leaves from the beamed ceiling. In the soft early-morning dimness of the store, the large brass weigh scale gleamed against the dark-stained wood of the wall. Grain scale and huge scarlet coffee grinder labelled in gold sat farther down the counter. Behind them, rich walnut canisters hid their treasures of peas, beans, rolled oats and barley. Jamaica ginger jostled pepper in silver-embossed tins on the second shelf. Above them squatted broad-mouthed syrup jars and vinegar crocks, stumpy dwarfs standing guard over the tall pyramids of cone sugar, which the storekeeper chopped, weighed and sold by the pound to be ground by the housewife at home.

On the counters and shelves opposite the food and kitchen supplies were all the everyday necessities of a pioneer village settlement — sewing needs and currycombs, painkillers and dishes, rolling pins and blankets, all crowded beneath a row of straw hats for little boys.

Papa made immediately for the big black safe in the far corner, and Henrietta for the rotund brown-sugar barrel. "Papa, may I pound the brown sugar with the auger to make it soft?" This was the chore she liked best whenever she visited the store, not only for the sweet fragrance of the sugar itself but for the glass jars on the shelf above full of sweets — horehound, barley sugar and humbugs.

Papa saw her eyeing the candy as he arranged his bags of cash in the drawers beneath the counter. "You may have one candy, childie," he said, "but no more than one. We'd never make a success of business if we ate up all the profits."

Sucking the barley-sugar stick with relish, Henrietta glanced around the store. There, above the front door, was her own sampler with the verse from the Bible. She remembered sitting forlorn and angry in the quiet of the bedroom at the time of John Alex's visit, and it seemed as if it had all happened to someone else. She had not even known Sarah then or seen the black man! As if in answer to her thoughts, the little bell sounded and grey-haired Master Richard Lowe strode into the store, behind him his slave. Her father withdrew with the visitor to discuss business in

a back room. Henrietta was alone with the black man. She turned slowly and faced him.

"Do they call you a name?" she said.

"Massa Lowe call me Joe, missy," he answered. A wide smile lit his face, the teeth gleaming white against the dark skin. The voice, gentle and slow, fascinated Henrietta.

She longed to keep him talking. "Does Master Lowe make you work very hard, Joe?"

"Massa Lowe my friend, missy. Sometime he make me work real hard, but not today." Joe stood above her like a giant. "We goin' downriver today to a weavin' shed near Mohawk Bay. Massa Lowe got some cloth to take back after fullin'."

The idea came to her like a lightning flash. "Joe, could you keep a secret for me?"

He looked surprised. "Missy, a black man got a lot o' secrets to keep. What you want me to do?"

Henrietta leaned across the counter. She whispered, "Joe, do you know the old split tree by Campbell's Rocks, the one struck by a storm?"

"Yes, missy, I pass it many time."

"Will you please leave a note in there for me if I write one now?"

Joe frowned. "Missy, this ain't gonna get me in no trouble?"

"Oh, no, Joe. It isn't mischief, really it isn't. Please do it for me. It's so important!"

"Missy, this note for black-haired child in willow tree?" he asked.

Henrietta stared at him. Of course! She had forgotten that he had seen them together down by the millpond. "Yes, Joe, but you must never tell a single person about us. She has nobody but me, Joe. We belong together in secret."

"I won't tell nobody, missy. I take your note." Joe smiled down at her. "I promise I don't tell nobody."

In wild haste, Henrietta scribbled on the back of a sheet of paper from her father's bill pad. *I am in the store today. Can you come in? H.M.*

Joe had just shoved it into his breeches pocket when his master returned. Papa was close on his heels. "You will please to grind two pounds of coffee for Master Lowe, lass, and be quick about it. He's waiting."

Henrietta poured the coffee beans from the big wooden bin into the hopper above the grinder. As she turned the wheel, the rich aroma of coffee filled the store. In a moment, Master Lowe and Joe were gone, the coffee under Joe's arm. Henrietta set about keeping herself busy. It would make the waiting easier to bear. As the village folk came in one after another throughout the morning, there was vinegar to pump from the barrel, a candle lamp to shine and parcel and tea to measure from the square box labelled "Japan Tea." In the straw matting with which the tea was packed, she found something to interest her.

"Papa," she said, "this looks like the summer carpet in the kitchen at home."

"You have a good eye, lass," Papa said. " 'Tis one and the same thing. Rachel and Becky weave the straw together to make a floor covering. Waste not want not, the Scriptures say, and we use what we can."

She sat to eat her lunch on a tall barrel of West Indies molasses, listening to her father discuss the affairs of the community with his friends. They stood about leaning on counters and smoking their pipes until the air was blue with smoke. Henrietta found the feather duster and began to dust the spice cupboard, pulling out every drawer to sniff the exotic fragrances within. They brought to mind vivid colours and strange sounds of places far away, and the billowing sails of schooners that had brought them over the Indian Seas. If only she and Sarah could go adventuring together, all sails set, down the Napanee River and into the wide world! At a sudden burst of laughter from the men, Henrietta turned. There, pressed close against the store window, was the familiar little white face — Sarah! Henrietta, careful to see she was not noticed, motioned her in. She tried to hide her eagerness as she leaned, waiting, across the counter.

Sarah entered, black eyes glancing fearfully to right and left. "My mistress wants a pennyworth of ginger, please, miss." Seeing no one was looking, she flashed Henrietta a brilliant smile. Quickly she shoved a scrap of paper across the counter. Henrietta swept it into her pocket and went to the spice shelf. In her own pinafore was a penny that Mama had given her to spend on her heart's desire. She had been waiting to make her choice until the end of the day. Now she found the largest piece of barley stick

in the glass jar, dropped her own penny with the ginger money into the coin drawer and handed the ginger and the candy in a bag to Sarah.

Sarah's eyes shone. "Thank you, miss," she said. Casting a furtive glance behind her at Master Macpherson, she sped out of the store door and off toward the river road.

Henrietta stood gaping after her. She was not even conscious of the group of men breaking up and moving to the door until her father's voice beside her made her jump.

"I've had my eye on you, lass, and you're a fine helper to have about, keeping yourself busy even when you're not told what to do." He peered through the store window at the little figure in the ragged skirt running down the road. "Was that not the vagabond who's staying with the Carscallion crew?"

Henrietta's heart pounded. "Was it, Papa?"

"Have you not heard?" Papa swept up some coffee grounds in front of the counter. "It seems young Luke picked her up when he was in Montreal on a business venture."

Henrietta pretended to read the labels on the colic medicine. "Papa, what business would take young Master Luke to Montreal?"

"He claims it was a shipment of furniture from the old family home in Ireland, but I doubt that. There's rebel trouble brewing in Lower Canada, my lass, and he's likely got wind of it and gone there for rebel ideas."

"Yes, Papa."

"'Tis like him to pick up a piece of flotsam from the wharf, not knowing from what she's come. I expect he wanted a servant about the house, and it was as good a way of getting one as he knew how." Papa leaned on his broom. "Just the same, lass, why did she come here today? The Carscallions have given their business to Detlor's Store since Luke and I had words." He thumped his broom angrily. "Unless he sent her here to spy on me!"

"Papa, she came for a pennyworth of ginger!" Henrietta said. "I think it likely that Detlor's Store was out of ginger and Mistress Carscallion is all set to make gingerbread."

"Just the same, I wonder at her coming here. Luke takes his grain for grinding to the Cartwright Mill now to spite me. Sometimes I pity the child growing up with the Carscallion clan. She

dwells in ignorance since Luke sees fit to keep her out of school. But, then, she's none of my business."

Henrietta realized that now more than ever she would have to use great care if the secret friendship was to be saved.

"Oh, Papa, look! It's the stagecoach from Kingston!" For the moment, she forgot Sarah as the coach rumbled to a stop in the inn yard, raising a cloud of dust. Master Archie McNeill from Clarkville got off and, following him, a lean, tall gentleman and a pretty young girl in a bright mauve sunbonnet.

"Papa, who are those people?" Henrietta asked.

"They're not of this village," Papa said. "I wonder could they be the actor and his daughter who are due here to give us some readings from Shakespeare in the schoolroom? Wait here, lass."

Suddenly Henrietta recalled Alistair's story of meeting two people of the acting profession. She took in every detail of their appearance, the long-faced man's steel-grey hair and large scarf tied in a bow at his neck, the pretty girl gesturing with her hands. Then she saw the other woman get off the coach. Something about her at once stirred a memory in Henrietta's mind. What could it be? The clothes were ordinary enough — plain brown woven calico, without a touch of colour at waist or neck, and brown sunbonnet. The face beneath the bonnet was not old, but all the gaiety of youth had gone from it.

As Henrietta watched, the woman turned to Papa. He motioned down the river, then pointed to the long bench that ran the length of the tavern verandah. When he came back to the store, his rotund body was shaking with haste.

"Lass, there's a woman come for the Hawkins household where Donald is helping today with the barn raising. Could you manage to care for the store while I give her a lift there in the wagon?"

"You mean I'm to stay alone and weigh and measure and make change?" Henrietta said. "Oh, Papa, do you think I can do it?"

"I'll set the whip to Mapes and we'll be back in jig-time," Papa said. "If you can't make change, tell the customers to charge it till next time. That won't put them out at all."

With a wave of his hand, he was gone. A moment later, she saw Mapes and the small wagon sweep around the corner, pick up the woman and make speed down the river road. The stranger, sitting stiffly beside Papa, stared straight ahead. Henrietta gazed after

them until the dust from the wagon wheels had settled.

She had no time to be afraid of serving alone behind the counter. Mistresses Hawley and Lang came up the steps a few minutes later. Delighted with her willingness, they helped her to weigh and count change. When they left with their baskets full, Henrietta felt proud. They were just disappearing beyond Pringle's Tavern when she remembered the note in her pocket. Glancing hurriedly about to see that no one was coming, she pulled it from her pocket. *They will be away on Saturday afternoon next to visit relatives in Camden. Just Lukey and me will be left. Could you come? We could take something for the witch-woman.* Next Saturday afternoon. But how could she get away down the river? It was even more impossible than going to the mill, and with Becky better, what reason could she invent for going to her house again?"

The arrival of Master John Gibbard, the cabinetmaker, put a stop to wondering. He had come to buy some stomach medicine for his wife and to see her father.

"May I give him a message, please sir?" Henrietta asked. "He'll be back, but it will take a while."

"I won't wait," Master Gibbard said. "Please to tell him the new cherrywood desk he ordered is ready and may be picked up at any time."

The new cherrywood desk! Papa had said nothing about a new desk. What would happen to her secret hiding place if the old desk in his study was replaced with a new one?

"Miss Henrietta, I will have the stomach medicine now, if you please."

Master Gibbard had had to repeat himself. She dropped a quick curtsey. "Oh, sir, I do beg your pardon! It is thoughtless of me to keep you waiting, especially if your wife is not well." She wrapped the bottle hastily in brown paper and handed it to the cabinetmaker. He tipped his hat as he went out the door.

When her father came in some time later, he was beaming. "I met Master Gibbard on the river road, childie, and he could not speak highly enough of your courtesy. 'Tis enough to make your old papa proud."

"Papa, you never told me you were getting a new desk. What's to happen to the old one?"

"The new desk is not for me, lass. It's my gift to John Alex for

the fine job he's doing in Hallowell for your Uncle Lowther. Which reminds me, this came in the mail for you yesterday, and I've had it tucked in my pocket since. Can you see who it's from?"

"John Alex!" She recognized the hand at once. "Oh, Papa, may I open it now?"

"Please do, child. I'm awaiting news too."

In her haste to open the envelope, she almost tore the letter.

My dear cousin Henry,

You cannot know what great pleasure it gave me to hear that your papa has allowed you to have your mirror. It grieved me to know that I had been the inadvertent cause of such unhappiness in your household. I trust I shall make it up to you somehow. Please tell your papa that his brother Lowther still, sadly enough, continues poorly and that there is more business than I can conveniently handle. It may interest him to know that my plans for uniting Hallowell and Picton have come to nothing. It seems I must apply my zeal for union to more worthwhile causes! Little cousin, we had a dramatic actor and his daughter here last week, and I hear they are to favour your village with a reading. Tell your papa I do think you should go. They present no material unsuitable for young ears; all is edifying in the extreme. I close with compliments to all inquiring friends in Napanee and district, and most affectionate regards to all the family.

*Your loving cousin,
John Alex.*

P.S. I almost forgot something of great importance. Please tell your father that plans for the 21st inst. suit me well. I am delighted that he has included me in them. Shall make every effort to come up the night before. As ever, J.A.M.

"Aha," Papa said. "That was to be a secret, and John Alex has almost let the cat out of the bag."

"Oh, Papa, please tell me!"

"No, lass. You know your papa. When he has a secret, a secret it shall be!"

And despite her wheedling, not a word more would he say. Elbows leaning on the store counter, she read and reread the letter, the warmth of her cousin's affection shining through the lines.

"What about the actor, Papa? Would it be the same one?"

"Doubtless it is, child. Do you think I should follow your learned cousin's advice and let you attend the readings?"

"Oh, Papa, please!"

"We shall see. They are performing in the schoolhouse tomorrow night." Papa stroked his whiskers. "Aye, she was a strange one, a strange one indeed."

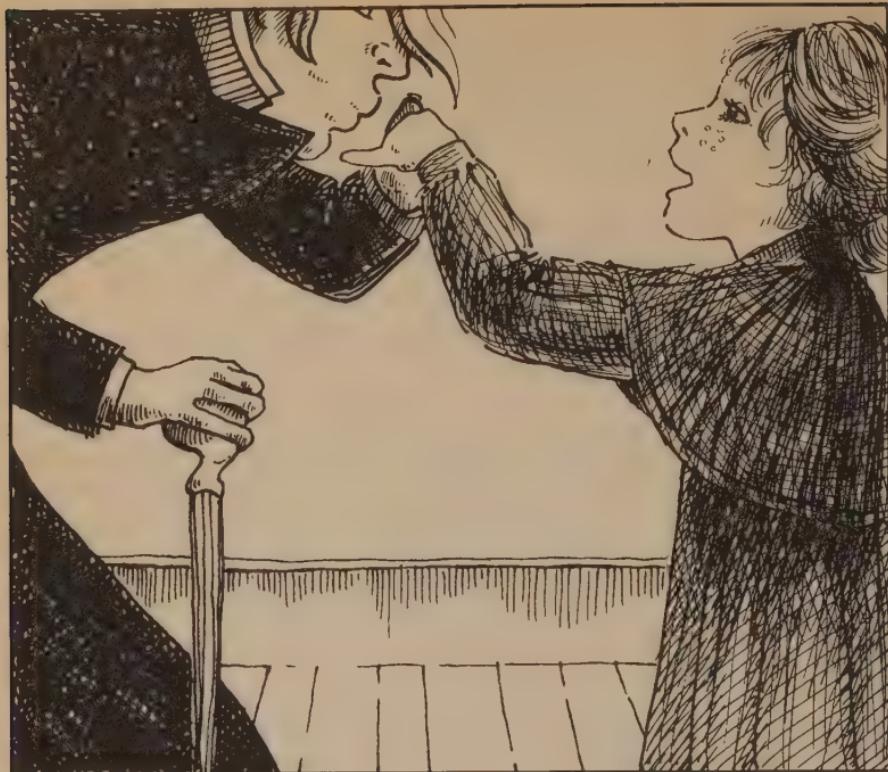
"Who, Papa?"

"Yonder woman whom I took to Hawkins," Papa said. "She was recommended as a servant by a relative in Montreal, but if she speaks as little as she did on the ride up the river, Mistress Hawkins will never know she's come at all."

"Papa," Henrietta said, "she reminded me of somebody."

"I can't think who it could be, childie. There's an Irish ring to the few words I heard her speak, but there's no merry Irishman would claim such a sad relative." Master Macpherson made some entries in his account book. "You'll be glad to know that your cousin Alistair was giving a hand at the barn raising. That boy has more application than I gave him credit for. It was he that came running to help the long-faced lady up to the cabin with her bag."

"I like Alistair, Papa. I hope he comes to our house again." It was too much to hope that he might come before Saturday so that she could find a way to return with him to the Carscallion farm. But a way must be found. With the family absent, the dark recesses of house and sheds could be explored, Sarah's bedroom visited, and perhaps, if she were lucky, even Old Lukey before the hearth. There was so much to think about — the actors and their readings, Papa's secret of the 21st inst., the lady with the dark eyes and unhappy face, and Saturday, with no plan afoot, coming too soon.



Chapter 14

*I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night . . .*

With a sweep of his hand, the actor motioned to the schoolroom desks lined against the wall as if they were the magic place beside the riverbank of which he spoke. Henrietta, seated between Mama and Papa, took in every detail of his costume — the gold of the capelike wings of fairyland sparkling in the candlelight, the fragile jewelled filigree of the crown reflecting the crimson of the velvet jerkin. The red-haired daughter, splendid in blue and silver, was ready to dance on as the Queen of Fairyland when her actor

father had gone from the stage.

The rich melodic phrases from the crude makeshift stage in the little school had filled the long evening with splendour. Beggars and kings, Roman generals and fools trod the pine boards. Every moment of the night was stored away in Henrietta's memory to share with Sarah in Willow Castle, but especially that time at the end of the performance when Papa congratulated the entertainers and introduced Henrietta to them. As he bent to kiss her hand, the actor swept so low that his long hair fell over his face.

"Madame," he said, "you shall be yet far fairer than you are. 'Tis an abundant pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"He treated me like a real grownup, Beck!" Henrietta said later in the bedroom. "And his daughter curtseyed to me as if I were the lady of the house!"

"So he should, miss. Your papa is Master Allan Macpherson, and there's nobody greater or more important than I know of." Becky hung her cloak in the wardrobe. "That's why, miss, I don't know if I should ask you or not."

Henrietta sat up in bed. "Ask me what, Beck?"

"Promise you won't think I'm bold, miss. You know I've always tried to keep my place while I've been in service here."

"Becky, for goodness' sakes tell me! Of course I don't think you're bold. You're my own dear sweet Beck and I love you. You know that." Henrietta jumped out of bed and stood in her night-gown staring up into Becky's face.

"It was my mama's idea, miss. Because you'd been so kind to me when I was abed with the ague, she wondered if you'd like to come and spend the day with us when next I go home. 'Tis only a simple settler's home, miss. Do you think your father . . . ?"

"Of course he'd allow it! I know he would! Oh, Beck, you are a darling to think of me!" Henrietta flung her arms around the girl. "Could it be this Saturday, Becky? Would you ask my papa and your mama both?" What a day that could be — a visit to Becky's farm, and with it, the possibility of seeing Sarah and the Carscallion home!

"I will, miss. I hope he doesn't have a fit of anger at the idea."

Henrietta pulled the cotton coverlet up to her chin. "I'm sure he won't, Beck." She watched the candle flicker. "Becky, do you know what is meant by the twenty-first I N S T ?" She spelled

out the letters as they had appeared in the note from John Alex.

"That means the twenty-first day of the month, miss. But we're already past that. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. It was just something I read." Whatever it was, then, would happen on August 21, and John Alex was coming up for it the night before. What could it be? Another party or ball? She would have to listen very hard to catch a hint of it in the next few weeks.

She suspected something when Papa announced that he must go to see Squire Briggs on Wednesday night. "Papa," Henrietta asked, "may I go and play with Fanny while you're doing business, please?"

"A certain young lady is too curious and her ears too sharp to be in the same house on this occasion," Papa said. "A surprise is no surprise unless it's kept secret."

"Then, may I come as far as the millpond and play there until you come back from Squire Briggs, Papa?"

"I suppose there's no harm in that, although I see no fun in your playing there alone. Shall I ask Miss Fanny to come down to you?"

"Oh, no! No, thank you, Papa. I play among the willows, and Fanny wouldn't like that. She'd be afraid she'd soil her dress!"

In hopes of meeting Sarah, she tucked the castle-mirror beneath her summer shawl when Wednesday evening came. The carriage wheels hummed like a swarm of bees as they drove along the hard-packed road. The millpond was as still as the glass of the mirror itself, the water broken only by a stray leaf drifting idly to the falls. Even before the carriage stopped, Henrietta could hear the throaty chirping of the tanager. *He knows I'm coming*, she thought. *He's bidding me welcome*.

Papa was speaking from the carriage seat. "See to it that you behave yourself, lass. I'll not be long with Squire Briggs. 'Tis on a watery business I'm going, to be truthful." With a wink, most unlike the serious-minded Papa, he was off.

Watery business? Whatever could he mean by that? Henrietta did not have long to wonder. The voice called from the tree, and the scarlet bird swept past her at the same instant.

"Henry, is it you now?"

"Sarah! I never really thought you'd be here." Clutching the mirror, Henrietta scrambled up the trunk to King Lukey's Arch.

Sarah gave her a hand. "I come here often when the supper dishes are done. Master Luke won't ever allow me in the village because of the rough men at the taverns, but I can play beside the river whenever I want."

"What about the day you came to the store?" Henrietta asked.

"Mistress Carscallion needed the ginger for baking, and the boys were all back in the fields. Oh, Henry, the barley stick was good! I took it home and hid it in my room and ate it piece by piece."

"Just wait till I tell you everything." Henrietta settled herself beside Sarah on an enormous limb. "I've found out the name of the black man. It's Joe. He it was who took the note for you on Saturday."

"I know. I saw him leave it there. Did you really speak to him?"

"I did, and he's just like you and me, Sarah. He says he has secrets too!" Henrietta looked at her solemnly. "Do you think he's planning to run away?"

Sarah leaned close. "Do you know something? That day at the circus, I think he wanted to see the bear go, but it would have been dashed to death on the falls. Oh, Henry, what a time we were having, sitting there so close and nobody to know at all!"

"There will be more times like that, Sarah," Henrietta promised. "But look here. I brought my castle to show you."

Startled, Sarah held it off at arm's length when she saw herself in the glass. "Arrah! Who is that creature?"

Henrietta laughed. "Why, 'tis your own self, Sarah. Do they not have a mirror at the Carscallions'?"

"Not one that I can look into," Sarah said. "I do not like the wild hair. It is not like your own pretty curls."

"It's better," Henrietta said. "I wish I could wear mine all hanging down. Then I wouldn't have to stand while Becky fusses with it. But look at the castle on the frame, Sarah. Can you imagine going into it and having adventures?"

"Aye, I can." Sarah's little fingers traced the door and archways and deep secret crevices. "Do you think a king and queen live there, or is it a witch's secret castle?"

"I think a very wicked witch lives there," Henrietta said. "She has a black slave, Joe. She has worked magic on him so he can never leave. But one day, a knight in golden armour comes along."

“What is his name?” Sarah asked.

“Sir John Alex Macdonald. He breaks the spell and sets the slave free, and the wicked old witch is banished forever from the castle.”

“Who lives in it now, then?” asked Sarah.

“Why, Sir John himself with his Lady Henrietta!”

Sarah clapped her hands, and, as if she had called, the tanager flew down to her shoulder. “Did you hear that, birdie? A wonderful story! And I shall be your servant, Lady Henrietta, and wait on you for the rest of my life.”

Henrietta flung an arm about Sarah. “No, no! You won’t be a servant. You’ll be my friend. And we’ll make you a lady too.”

“It all sounds so grand,” Sarah sighed. “But I shall never be a lady. I sometimes wonder how long I shall even be the servant girl at the Carscallions’.”

“What do you mean?” Henrietta said.

“Young Master Luke has spoken now and then of sending me away to someone else, a sister who lives in Kingston town.” Sarah’s eyes filled with sudden tears. “Oh, Henry, I would run away! I could not bear to leave you and Willow Castle.”

“But they can’t make you go! They can’t!” Henrietta was almost shouting. “Don’t think about it, and then it will never happen. Sarah, I have the best of news to tell you. I may be going home with Beck on Saturday. I want you to wait for me somewhere in the long grasses when the Carscallions have gone. I’ll try to find a way to come to you.”

“Just what I had hoped,” Sarah said. “Do you think we could go to have a peek at the witch-woman again?”

“Is there a way we could see her without her seeing us?” Henrietta asked.

Sarah said, “We could go through the cave and peek out at the top to see if she is at home. Would you be frightened to go through the cave again?”

“Not if you stay beside me,” Henrietta said. “Sarah, I want to take some food to the witch-woman. If she’s nowhere to be seen, we could leave some by her hearth.”

“Let’s do it, then,” Sarah said. “I don’t believe she would harm us. She’s not at all like the wicked witch who used to live in the mirror-castle.”

They both laughed. "Still, Sarah," — Henrietta was serious again — "her strange looks frighten me." She began to climb. "Let's go up to Sir John Alexander's Tower now, and I shall tell you all about the kings and queens and witches I saw the other evening when the actor and his daughter made a play for us in the schoolhouse."

High in the Tower, one arm flung about a branch, Henrietta shared the delights of the Shakespeare evening while she gazed out over the village. The river, glistening in the evening light, meandered slowly down to Mohawk Bay, bound by fields of wheat bronzing with the approach of harvest.

"Is that your papa's carriage coming down the hill from the house so soon?" Sarah clung to her arm. "You will try to come to the farm on Saturday?"

"I'll find a way," said Henrietta. "It's too good a chance to miss."

It was quite evident that the meeting had gone well. Papa beamed from the driver's seat as he helped Henrietta up into the carriage.

"Now, don't wheedle your papa for information. 'Tis a secret of the largest order, and not even my own lass shall find out what it is."

"I shall be good and wait, Papa," Henrietta said. In a swift glance backward to Willow Castle, she caught sight of the small white face peering over the rim of the Duke of Napanee's Dungeon.

When they arrived home, Master Macpherson went immediately to his room — "to write an important letter" as he said.

"Do you suppose I dare rap on the door and ask him about Saturday now, miss?" Becky whispered as she helped Henrietta into bed.

"Now is the very time, Beck! He's in a wonderful good mood." Henrietta leaned against the pillows. "I'll wait till you come back. Now be sure to drop a very low curtsey. Papa loves good manners and soft speech, Beck."

"Very well, miss," Becky said.

She was back in a moment. "It's all right, miss. He says if you behave yourself and it isn't too much trouble for my mama, you may come."

"Oh, Becky, you're a dear darling girl, and some day, I shall

do something wonderful for you!" Henrietta danced a jig on the bed. "Now please make Saturday come quickly!"

Becky gave her a swift hug. "I can't do much about that, miss, but we'll try to give you a happy time."

For the next several days, Henrietta hovered over Becky like a mother hen with a chick, lifting and carrying for her, constantly at her elbow in the summer kitchen in the cellars. Secreting enough food to take to Sarah and the witch-woman was quite another matter. When she appeared at breakfast in the heat of Thursday morning wearing her heavy brown linsey-woolsey dress, Mama looked at her with astonishment.

"Why in the name of goodness are you dressed so warmly, dear child?" Her long fingers fluttered to Henrietta's forehead. "You haven't a fever, have you? Oh dear, there are so many things going about nowadays!"

"I'm all right, Mama. Please don't fret." Henrietta planted a quick kiss on her mother's cheek. Somehow, once she had met Sarah, Mama had become more precious. "I like this dress very much, that's all." *Especially because it has such large sleeves*, she thought.

Into them went Rachel's caramel morning rolls, cornmeal muffins and cold wheat cakes. At noon, the fare was even better: slices of homemade bread spread thick with golden butter, a pork pastry and a raspberry tart. Her sleeve was wet and sticky when she removed them in her room and wrapped them in a napkin. She went to the stone well and sponged it out when no one was looking. The treats themselves looked to her like a feast because she was going hungry to add to her store. But Sarah's face as she ate them would be satisfying enough, and there would still be some for the witch-woman on the limestone ridge.

The Secret of Willow Castle



Chapter 15

When Saturday morning came, her embroidered brown bag, which usually held needle, thread and sampler, was filled to the brim with goodies. As Becky's father drove up in his small cart, Becky eyed the bag with some surprise. "Why, miss, there won't be much time for working on a sampler today. I thought you was coming to have fun!"

"Oh, I am, Beck. I'm just carrying along a few things I need."

The drive to Becky's farm was noisy and slow. The rickety wheels of the old cart tumbled and complained over the river road. Becky's father was a quiet man, and only by a brief "Yes, miss," or "You don't say, miss," or "That be true if I be an Englishman, miss," did he reply to Henrietta's continual chatter. As they drove up the hill past Campbell's Rocks and the lightning tree, Henrietta stared all about her, watching. Her eyes widened when Becky spoke.

"There's someone up in that elm tree yonder, miss. Some of the river children having a game, I expect."

Sarah! Sarah was in the elm tree waiting for them to pass. "I expect so, Beck," she said, smiling herself.

Becky's mother was at the gate to meet them and curtseyed low as Henrietta was helped from the wagon by her husband. "This be a great pleasure for us, Miss Henrietta. We've scrubbed and polished and baked in honour of this day."

"'Tis a great pleasure for me too, Mistress Welkin. Mama says you must be very busy with your farm, and it is very kind of you to have me."

"It's a plain and simple settler's home we have, miss. I hope you won't mind it," said Mistress Welkin.

Its very plainness and simplicity delighted Henrietta. Her own home had many rooms, the settler's cabin but one, the whole centring about the immense hearth blazing even now in the warmth of an early August morning. Tall cabinets holding the good china dishes, the wash bench, buckets and tubs and an old grandfather clock — all glowed in the light of the fire. Instead of the cherrywood tables and chairs of the morning room or the

mahogany of the dining room, here were heavy, crudely cut table and benches, flanked by the loom where the cloth for clothing and blankets was woven and the spinning wheel that produced the thread used in its making. Several objects were familiar. The long-handled shovel, the blackened skillet and the bellows, all hanging above the mantel, reminded Henrietta of Rachel's and Becky's domain at home.

"Where do you sleep, Beck?" asked Henrietta. "Beside the fire, as Adam does sometimes when it's too cold for him to stay in the stable?"

"Oh my, no, miss!" Becky laughed. "My mother and father sleep down here. I sleep upstairs." She took Henrietta's hand. "Come along, miss, I'll show you. Watch your step."

She led the way up the steep, narrow stairs. The room at the top was furnished sparsely with a small rope bed, a pine washstand and a dark-stained chest of drawers, all crouching beneath a low-pitched roof. "Why, Beck, you haven't even a hearth in your room," Henrietta said. "Don't you get cold?"

"In the winter, when I wake up here at home, miss, there's often frost on my quilts. And many's the time I've had to break the ice in the wash jug."

"You should stay at our house all the time, then," Henrietta told her. "But there's a reason why you come home, Beck, and I know it."

"Now, miss, don't tease," Becky said.

"How is Master Peter Fairfield these days, Beck?" Henrietta whispered.

"Doing well, miss, and his farm is coming fine." Becky changed the subject. "Now do come down. Mama wants to know if you'd like to try your hand at the spinning wheel or the loom. You don't get the chance in your house."

With spinning and weaving and a hand at mixing dough, the morning sped by. After the simple lunch of homemade soup and chicken pie, Becky's father wanted his turn.

"My Beck could take you out to show you my fields, miss, if you'd like it. There's a lot of fine growing in this good summer weather."

"My papa is very proud of his farm," Becky said. "Do come, Miss Hen."

"I'd truly love it."

Following Becky around the farm like a faithful dog, she admired the oats waving blue-green in the sun, the wheat with its first burnish of gold and the stumps smouldering in fields that Master Welkin was at that moment clearing for cultivation. As they came into a great stand of oaks on the limestone ridge, Henrietta saw the tall, broad-shouldered figure leaning against a tree trunk.

"Beck, look!" she shouted. "It's Master Fairfield!"

"Is it, miss?" Becky's look of surprise did not deceive Henrietta.

"Isn't it wonderful that we came this way and bumped into him, Beck?" Henrietta's heart raced with an idea. "Becky, would you mind if I went for a walk along the edge of the bush while you're talking to Master Fairfield? I do so love to go adventuring."

Becky gave her a swift hug. "Oh, miss, you are an understanding one. Bless you always! I shall see that you dance at my wedding, miss, I really shall!"

Henrietta stayed long enough to drop Master Fairfield a curtsey. Then she flew down the field in the direction of the Carscallion farm. Sarah, sitting atop a fence post, saw her coming. She jumped to the ground, raced through the wheat that bordered the road and shouted in an ecstasy of joy. "I knew you'd come! I knew it! I was seeing you pass this morning, and I have waited ever since."

A sudden thought made Henrietta step back and glance fearfully toward the house. "You said the family would be gone, Sarah. What about Alistair?"

"He's gone down the river to help the Hawkins family for the day. He goes down there many times of an evening. He likes to chat with Master Hawkins and his wife. He says it reminds him of home."

Henrietta followed her up the path to the house. "From what Papa said, Alistair wouldn't talk much with the new woman who's come to help in the house. Papa drove her there, and he said she was a sad and lonesome one."

"I think Alistair likes her. He said he would like to talk to her more, but she has little to do with any of them. Only when they speak about old times and the old country will she join in." Sarah suddenly raced ahead. "But let's not talk about them anymore.

I have so much to show you! And there isn't much time."

The early apples shone red and gold in the sun as they came up through the orchard. "The schooners will soon come to take the apples in barrels from the wharf," Sarah said. "Sometimes I think I may hide in a barrel and go away with them. Then I wouldn't have to worry about them sending me away."

"You must never do that, Sarah! I won't let you go, I promise I won't. Some day, you and I will go in a schooner and explore the world, but you must not speak of going alone." She was hushed by the vaulted darkness of the woodshed. It was used for more than storing firewood. The carcasses of two deer hung from the rafters and between them a huge ham. At the end closest to the stone wall of the house squatted wide milk buckets sending forth their odour both sweet and sour into the low-beamed room. Spikenard and catnip, mint, parsley and sage were drying among the rafters.

"What's that strange thing?" Henrietta pointed to a large curved iron article with a big trumpetlike opening.

"The dinner horn. Master Kessler, the blacksmith, made it for us. When we blow on it, the workmen in the fields know it's time to come home for dinner." Sarah took her hand. "Come with me now. We have to go through the cold pantry and into the kitchen. Old Lukey is waiting for us."

Henrietta looked alarmed. "But won't he tell the others I've been here?"

"They never listen to him," Sarah said. "He is so old, nobody pays attention to him anymore. That is why we are friends. Nobody pays attention to me, either."

The kitchen they entered was very much like Becky's but larger and lower-ceilinged, hung with huge pine beams. "Don't be minding Old Lukey," Sarah said. "He is forgetting what he says, and saying it over and over. 'Tis because he's so old." The old man was seated in a rocking chair before the stone fireplace. Even in the heat of the day, a fire blazed there. "He's always cold," Sarah explained. She moved softly to his side and took his gnarled old hand. "Master Lukey, sir, I've brought my friend. This is Henrietta."

Old Lukey's hooded eyes peered up at Henrietta. He submitted quite willingly as Sarah placed her friend's hand in his.

"Old Lukey, please tell us the story of the war, and the soldiers who nearly hanged your son. Please, Master Luke."

"Eh?"

"The story about the war, Old Lukey, and the twelve thousand acres," Sarah said.

"Twelve thousand acres, all mine it was," the old man began. "The Yankees wanted me to fight against my king, they did, but I would not be doing it. I'd had enough of fighting in my day." He stared blankly at Henrietta. "Henrietta? What is your father's name?"

Sarah held up a warning finger. "Do tell us the rest, Old Lukey. You wouldn't fight with the Yankees against the British, so what did they do?"

Old Lukey stared into the fire.

"Won't he tell?" Henrietta whispered.

"He's forgotten us already," said Sarah. "He hid from the Yankees when they came searching for him. His little son wouldn't tell where he was, and the Yankees nearly hanged him for it. They took all Old Lukey's land, twelve thousand acres!" She beckoned to Henrietta to follow her up the stairs. "Now I want you to see where I live."

The room at the top was no more than a loft cramped under the eaves. "There was spiders and webs up here when first I came," Sarah said, "but I swept them all away with the hearth broom." She had kept the rough-hewn, unfinished boards as clean as she could. There was no sign of a rug, but Sarah had placed a worn quilt on the floor. "So it is not so very cold for my feet when I crawl out of bed on a winter morning," she said. "When I'm very cold, I sit at the top of the steps, and the heat comes up from the kitchen."

Henrietta thought of the flames leaping on her own hearth on winter nights and mornings, and of the warm canopied bed. "Oh, Sarah, how I wish you could come and live with me and be my own sister! There is room in my bed for both of us, and lots of clothes to fit you, if Beck took a stitch here and there."

"Don't fret about me," Sarah said. "I am happy up here in my room, as long as you are my friend and Willow Castle is our secret place. That makes me the happiest person in all the wide

world!" She stopped suddenly. "If only Master Luke does not send me away."

"Has he spoken of it again?"

"More often than ever now. He says it is not good for me with all the boys here. First of all, he said he would send me to his sister's in Kingston, and now there is talk of someone else wanting me, someone in York." Sarah's voice fell to a whisper. "Oh, Henry, I cannot leave this place. What if I never saw you again, or the river, or Willow Castle and our bird?"

"Sarah," Henrietta began solemnly, "I promise you, you shall never leave. Somehow I shall stop it. If the day ever comes when they decide you really must go, you will let me know, and I will make it all come out right. I promise you with all my heart!"

"I knew it! You are my true friend! Look! I have my music box in here." Sarah had been digging beneath a ragged shawl in the board chest. "I play it all the time up here where the boys can't get at it."

"I have more presents for you." Henrietta delved into the sampler bag. "Some of them are for the witch-woman, but keep yours up here, and you can eat them when you wish."

Sarah eyed a squashed raspberry tart. "Could I eat one now? They all look so good!"

"I'll bring you more when I can," Henrietta said. She had gone to the tiny window that overlooked the wheat field and the river. "You can see a long way from here."

"Yes, but most important of all, I can see the lightning tree and anyone who comes to hide a message there for me." Sarah wiped her lips on her skirt. "Shall we go now and find the witch-woman?"

Henrietta hid her sudden fear. "Let's!" she said. "I want to be the one to leave the food in her shanty."

With no one working in the fields to see them, they went gaily through the hickory woods. While they waded up to their knees in the cold spring water of the creek, the sunlight splattered the springy carpet of the forest and made deep shadows beneath the ancient oaks and the grey boles of the beeches. Coming to the lichenized rocks at the edge of the forest, they hesitated and looked up toward the Devil's Pulpit.

"I don't see her anywhere, do you?" Sarah whispered.

"No, but she moves so quietly, she could be watching us right

now," Henrietta said. "Sarah, I don't really wish to speak to her again. Do you think we could take the food to her hut without being seen?"

"We could try. Would you mind going through the cave again?" Sarah asked.

"I'll go," Henrietta said. "Let's keep very quiet."

Henrietta took off her shoes and stockings as they came into the cave. Talking in whispers, they groped their way in the darkness. When a small stone skittered down from a rock shelf, Henrietta started and clung to Sarah; they peered around, but there was no one there.

Outside again, up on the rock, they stared at the witch's shanty leaning in the shadow of the bush. Even the door clutching the frame with the broken leather thong hung without movement in the hot stillness of the day.

"Do you want me to take the bread and cakes in?" Sarah whispered. "I don't see her about."

"No, I must take them." Henrietta's heart raced. "It was my arm she mended with her salve. Sarah," she said, turning to her suddenly, "if I don't come back right away, please come and search for me."

Bending low, she slipped along the edge of the forest to the back of the shanty. Since there were no windows, she could not see if the place was occupied. But comforted by Sarah's watching from the edge of the cave, she sidled around the corner of the house and peeked in the doorway. The witch-woman was not there. Only the cauldron over the smouldering fire went on with its everlasting bubbling, and a big bumblebee droned among the rafters. Henrietta ran in the door, cleared a space on the littered table, dumped the contents of her sampler bag upon it, and turned to flee over the rocks to Sarah. She flung herself down on the moss-covered slope.

"Did you see her anywhere?"

"I think she's watching us. I'm sure I saw a black skirt among the trees. Do you think we should hide and wait to see if she goes into the shack?"

"Oh, no!" Henrietta said. "I don't want to see her again. Besides, if I don't get back soon, Becky will be angry, and she'll never let me come again."

"I know a path you can take along the edge of the woods back to the Welkins' farm. But do you really have to go so soon?" Sarah looked downcast.

"Don't be sad, Sarah. I'll meet you again as soon as I can at Willow Castle. And Beck will be going home again now. I can send notes for the lightning tree."

"Come along then," Sarah said. "We'll be going through the bush on the other side of the shanty and finding the path by the wheat field."

Once on the path, Henrietta took to her heels and ran. She was gasping for breath when she came to the glade of oaks where she had left the young man and Becky. The latter was standing glancing with great anxiety in all directions. Master Fairfield was nowhere in sight.

"Oh, miss, what a fright you've given me!" Becky cried out. "I couldn't imagine what had happened to you. Peter's gone up the other path to search for you."

"Oh, Beck, I am so sorry. I was longer than I thought."

"It's all right now you're back, miss. But Peter has told me there's been bears seen round these parts, and I was terrified when you was so long. Here comes Peter now. I'd best say good-bye and get us both home, or Mama will be wondering where we've got to."

Mistress Welkin was waiting for them with English scones and a pot of tea. "It won't hurt you with lots of milk, miss," Becky said. "Mama calls it cambric tea."

Later that evening, to a chorus of crickets and bullfrogs, Master Welkin drove her home along the river road in the rickety cart. Papa, who was waiting for them at the front door, shook hands courteously with Master Welkin and inquired after his wife and the state of his farm. Henrietta dropped a curtsey, expressed her warm thanks and sped into the house.

Donald was coming down the stairs. "Psst, sis!" he whispered. "There's news!"

"News?" Her eyes made round O's in her face.

"It seems to be a mystery. I overheard Papa talking to Mama about it. Something to do with the river and the twenty-first of the month."

"Donald, what is the twenty-first?" Henrietta asked.

"King William's birthday. But they usually just have the militia parade up and down the village street, with Papa in his major's uniform shouting orders. Hen, I'm sure there's more to the celebrations this year."

"We shall just have to wait and see what it is, I suppose," Henrietta sighed. "But oh, Donald, it is so hard to wait for things!"

"What's this? What are we waiting for?" Papa came in the front door.

Henrietta turned to him quickly. "Papa, you're just the one I want to see! It's about the Carscallions, Papa. Please forgive me if I'm curious, but I have heard you call young Master Luke and his family Yankee something-or-other. Papa, I heard a tale down the river today while I was visiting. It seems Old Lukey would not fight with the Yankees against the king. He could have been hanged for it, if they'd found him. His son wouldn't tell where he was hiding, either, even when they said they'd hang him too!"

Papa did not look at her. "I have heard all this, lass. How does it concern you?"

"It was just a story I heard, Papa, and the Yankees took twelve thousand acres away from Old Lukey. Papa, if they did that, Carscallions couldn't be Yankees themselves, could they?" She gazed up at him, almost pleading.

"Perhaps not Yankees, but at least traitors to the government. The Carscallions are members of the Reform Party, child. I want none of their names as much as mentioned in my house." He eyed her keenly for a moment only, then strode into the study and shut the door behind him.

A wave of despair swept over Henrietta. But even without her father's help, she must never allow Sarah to leave the village of Napanee. She was her friend forever.



Chapter 16

But why is John Alex coming up all the way from Hallowell if it's only for the king's birthday?" "Maybe he has to make a speech in praise of the king and colonies, Hen," Donald said. "Papa would like him to enter politics, and think what good practice it would be for him, standing on a nail keg and addressing all the good people of Napanee!"

A dancing lesson finished, Henrietta was curled up in the loft with Donald sprawled beside her. It had been a week and a half now since she and Sarah had met. Notes had passed frequently between them by means of Becky and the secret panel, each one from Sarah more like a plaintive cry for help than the last. She turned suddenly to Donald.

"Donald, are you never going to the mill again, so that I may go with you?"

"I've been taking over in the store, sis. Papa's finding his other chores are taking more and more of his time, and he says I must learn the store management from A to Z."

"Oh, Donald, I do so long to go to the mill again. Even Papa goes down straight from the store now so that I can't go with him." She knelt on the hay. "Please do me a favour and ask if you can have a day to help Master Weekes."

"Oh, all right, sis," Donald said. "I'll see what I can do." He headed for the loft ladder. "Tell you what. I'll trade a trip to the mill, and no questions asked, for another hour of dance lessons tomorrow night."

"Agreed!" Henrietta followed him down the narrow steps. "And I won't tell a soul why you're such a fine dancer."

In the cool freshness of the Monday morning, they were seated together in the small wagon on their way down the river road. "I didn't even have to wheedle," said Donald. "Papa said old Eli has more work than he knows what to do with."

When Donald had tied Mapes to the hitching post, Henrietta scurried away to the millpond, aware that her brother was watching her go with great curiosity. She turned only once and saw him shrug his shoulders and go in the mill door.

"Sarah!" There was no answering whisper from the leafy shadows of the tree, but she knew Sarah would come. Letters had been exchanged in the lightning tree. Henrietta sat quiet in King Lukey's Arch, waiting. It was good to be in the leafy bower again, surrounded by the secret whispering of the leaves. Half an hour passed and there was still no sign of Sarah. Henrietta scrambled up Lord Liam's Stair to the Tower and, squinting her eyes against the sunlight, stared down the river. Almost an hour had gone when she saw the wisp of a figure flying down through the trees, bare feet kicking up whorls of dust, black hair streaming.

Sarah was breathless when she leaned against the tree trunk. "Arrah, I thought you would go and all! I had to scrub the pantry and kitchen floors and help with the morning milking. I started work early, I did, so I could come here." Her eyes danced. "Have you seen our bird?"

Scarlet wings fluttered suddenly in the dusk of the tree, and the tanager perched on Sarah's shoulder. Henrietta coaxed until the

bird came to her arm, and holding him there, she climbed the tree after Sarah to Sir John Alexander's Tower. From the top of the tree, they surveyed the wide world.

"Soon Mistress Dier's school will be starting again," Henrietta sighed. "I wish there were no such thing as school, Sarah. Will Master Luke let you go to school this fall?"

A shadow passed over Sarah's face. "I heard him and Mistress Carscallion speaking about it at the hearthside yesterday night. They said if I was to go away, there was no sense in my starting. I know, then, they mean to send me away." She turned her black eyes to Henrietta. "But you said you would not allow it, Henry. You will look after me, will you not?"

"I told you I would." Henrietta tried to hide her sudden panic. "But nothing definite has been said about your going yet. It may not be so at all! Don't think about it now, Sarah. We have a whole lovely morning in Willow Castle, and Wednesday is the king's birthday. Something exciting is going to happen right in the midst of us, I know it!"

"Shall I be able to see it, do you think?"

"It's to happen right on the river, so of course you shall," Henrietta said. "And Papa will be leading all the soldiers in a parade. John Alex is coming too, Sarah, the one who gave me the castle-mirror. Oh, I do wish you could meet him and he you!"

"I should never be able to meet a fine gentleman like that," Sarah sighed. "But then nothing matters as long as we are friends in Willow Castle."

"Have you seen any more of the witch-woman?" asked Henrietta.

"Yes, I crept away up to the shanty yesterday, and do you know what? A fine gentleman came through the bush on a white horse and got some medicine from her. I listened, and she would take no money, only food that the gentleman carried to the door of the shanty for her. I asked Old Lukey about it. He said her medicines have been known to cure people when the doctor could not."

"Her salve fixed my arm." As Henrietta examined the place where the graze had been, she was glad she did not have to go there for herbs.

"Let's go down and swing our legs from King Lukey's Arch,"

Sarah said. "We can talk about all you've done since last I saw you."

"How is Alistair?" asked Henrietta. "He has not been back to see Papa."

"He works very hard. When the work is done, he often goes down the river to the Hawkins place. I like Alistair, Henry. Once when I was sitting by the stump fence waiting to bring back the lunch buckets, he told me a Scottish tale of fairies."

Henrietta sat bolt upright and put her finger to her lips. "Ssh! There's someone under the tree. I heard a twig snap." She parted the branches and looked down. "It's Joe, Master Lowe's slave, again!"

The black man stood looking up at them. He smiled slowly. "You got a good hidin' place, missy," he said softly.

Henrietta slithered to a lower branch. "You won't tell anyone, Joe. It's a secret place."

"I know, missy. I ain't gonna tell. I had me a hidin' place once too, when I'm a little boy."

Henrietta's eyes widened. "You did? Where was it?"

"In a sycamore tree. It look a lot like your tree here. I call it my 'big house.' "

"Your big house?" Henrietta said.

"Yes, missy. Way back home, my massa live in big white house. I pretend I live in one too," Joe said. "Well, missy, I got to be goin'. Massa Lowe be out in the wagon pretty soon. He come to see your pa 'bout Wednesday. You sure goin' have fine day on that big schooner, missy! I be there to watch you go." Joe smiled at her and then turned toward the mill.

"Sarah, did you hear that?" Henrietta scaled the tree like a squirrel. "Joe said 'on the schooner'! Sarah, do you suppose Papa is going to take us all on a schooner ride down the river?"

"I think it must be so. And indeed, you must remember every minute of your journey so that you can tell me!" Even Sarah's face glowed.

"Sarah, you could watch us go by if we go down the river on a ship."

"I could! I could!" Sarah said. "I could hide among the leaves of the big tree that overhangs the river. Will you wave at me?"

"Yes, but there must be some sign between us," Henrietta said.

"Could you call, 'Oh, look! There is a tanager bird high in the willow tree'?"

"That's it, that's just what I shall say," Henrietta promised. "I can't wait till Wednesday comes!"

On Tuesday, when there was neither sign nor mention of John Alex's arrival, Henrietta began to wonder. And yet Tuesday afternoon and evening, the kitchen was fragrant with the scent of sweet breads and caraway loaves. Henrietta, curled up in the window seat, did her best to pry information from Rachel and Becky.

"Papa and Mama must be planning a big party," she said innocently. "Rachel, you haven't baked so many cakes since John Alex was last up in the ballroom with his friends."

"Miss Henrietta seems to be eating so many cakes herself these days that we have to make a good many more." Henrietta saw Rachel's swift wink to Becky. "'Tis a wonder she doesn't get fat with so many sweets, isn't that right, Becky?"

"Right enough, Rachel. 'Tis likely she spends so much time running around the millpond and up and down willow trees that she wears it all off."

Henrietta changed the subject at once. "Beck, it's getting dark. You're going to be late walking home along the river if you don't hurry and be off."

"Oh, didn't your mama tell you, miss?" Becky said. "I'm not going home tonight. I'm to sleep here on the little bed in the work-room."

"Oh?" Something was in the wind then, and Becky was staying to help. She would wheedle it out of her when night had come and the rest of the family was asleep. It was too long to wait till tomorrow.

Papa came in an hour later and stood at the kitchen door. "All ready in here?" he shouted. "We must be up at dawn."

"Yes, master, all's ready," Rachel replied. "I'll have to ask Adam to fetch the baskets from the storeroom first thing in the morning, and they'll be all set for you when you come back from the parade."

Baskets? What could baskets have to do with it? Henrietta lay in the canopied bed and tried to remember every word. Was it possible that the food was not for them but for some poor settler

whom Papa wanted to help? Or, after the schooner ride, was there to be a party at the house?

It was well that everyone went to bed early. Even with the excitement that set her thoughts dancing, Henrietta found it difficult to keep her eyes open until the house was silent. The last sound she heard was her father's boot dropping to the floor and the creak of a board as his heavy body met the bed. When she awoke, the moonlight was coming in the window. Taking no time to find her slippers, she padded barefoot down the hall and up the stairs. Her father's loud snores met her in the bedroom as she crept past on tiptoe. Although the door of the narrow passage to the servants' quarters squeaked loudly as she opened it, there was no movement from her parents' bed. She groped her way to the three narrow steps that led to the workroom. The moonlight was here too, making the room with its spinning wheel and loom a magic place, and Becky, lying with her fair hair flung out upon the pillow, a sleeping princess. Henrietta stood and stared at her. Curiously, for the moment, she did not see her as dear Beck who was always at her call, but as a lovely stranger, long fair lashes sweeping down over the rosy cheeks. A sudden surge of love for Becky made her bend and kiss her quickly on the cheek.

Becky murmured in her sleep and then sat up. "Mmmm? Who is it?"

"Ssh! It's me, Beck. Henrietta."

"Miss! What are you doing here in the middle of the night?"
Becky blinked. "Is something wrong?"

"Beck, it's too hard to wait till tomorrow," Henrietta whispered. "I know something terribly exciting is going to happen. Please tell me what it is!"

"I can't breathe a word, miss! Would you get me into trouble with your papa?"

"Please, Beck. Is John Alex coming? It said in my letter he was to come tonight, but he didn't. Is he going to make a speech for the king's birthday, Beck?"

Becky, with great effort, rose and spoke solemnly. "Miss, you could stand here all night and you still wouldn't wheedle a mite out of me. Now go back to your bed, or you'll never be ready for all that's to happen tomorrow!" Quickly Becky pulled the coverlet over her head.

With a sigh, Henrietta turned and slipped through the passage to the bedroom. If she went right back to bed and to sleep, morning would come like the wink of an eye, and then she would know everything. As her bare feet padded on the hall rug, she stopped quite still. There had been sudden shouts down the river. She ran to the hall window and peeked out. In the moonlight, not a breath stirred. The shouts came again, echoing as if from some other world beyond the still moonlight. Then she saw a strange thing. A tall pole was moving white above the green branches of the willows far down by the mill. She watched it, fascinated, until it grew still and the shouts died away. Then she knew. It was the schooner, come up the river by night in secret and anchored off the wharf! Papa had kept the mystery well, and now, tomorrow could not dawn soon enough. She ran down the steps like a little white ghost in the night and back to her own room.



Chapter 17

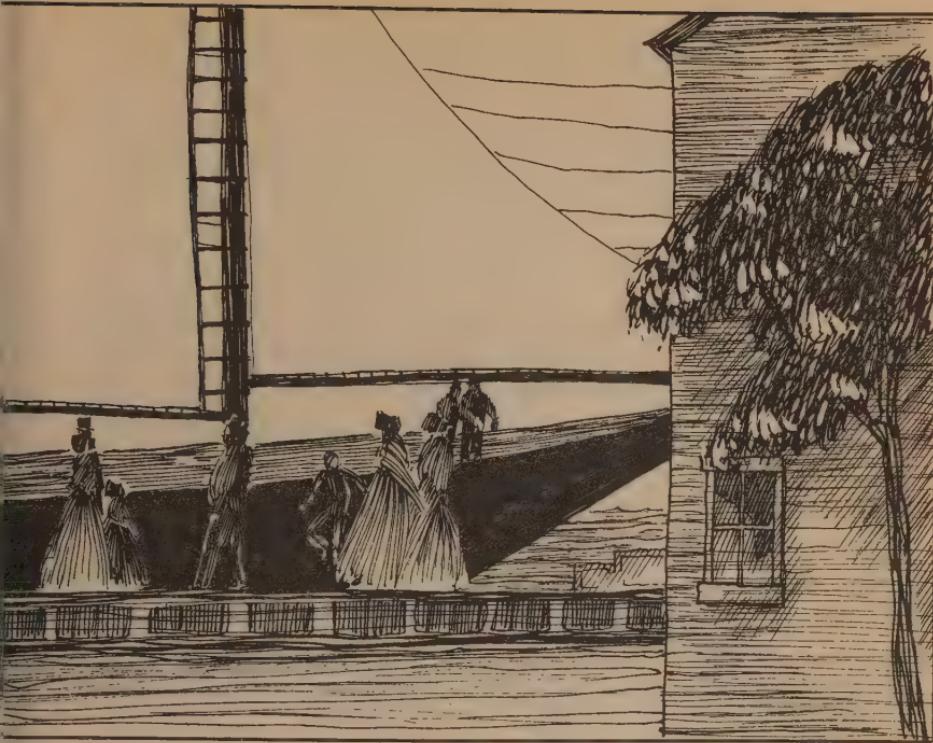
The house was full of shouting when Becky tried to shake her awake the following morning. "Hurry along, miss," she said, "or you'll miss something!"

Papa was already at breakfast, resplendent in the gold and scarlet of his major's uniform. Jamie and Alexander were standing before him in their best clothes, and even Donald was immaculate in pressed trousers and shining buttons. "Like a carrot nine times scraped," Rachel muttered as she brought the porridge from the kitchen.

"Tell me, child, are my petticoats showing?" Mama fussed with the shawl over her best blue silk gown. "We must all look our best. This is an important day for Papa."

"Not a bit, Mama. You do look so grand!" Henrietta said. "Where are we to sit and watch the parade?"

"On a special platform built down by Pringle's Tavern. We're



all to sit there, and not a peep out of you children while Papa is giving the orders, or dear knows what he'll say to you after it's all over!"

As Adam drove them in the best carriage with the crimson upholstery, it seemed that the whole village was on the street to watch them pass. Soldiers straggled into town from all directions. Some, with no guns at hand, held pitchforks and rakes over their shoulders. With Papa bellowing commands, they formed up in the street before Pringle's Tavern, trying with great difficulty to bring some order to their lines. A soldier with a huge old drum beat time while they made various manoeuvres. At one point, they became so entangled and confused that Papa had to dismiss them with a shout and bid them reassemble. His face was red with effort and the warmth of the morning. Henrietta, among her family on the dais, felt pride in her father's great importance. When he finally brought his troops to attention and spoke a few solemn words in honour of King William, a loud cheer both for him and for the king went up from the crowd. The ceremony ended with a volley

of musket fire toward the bush behind the tavern.

As the crowd dispersed, Henrietta looked about eagerly for a sign of Sarah or the Carscallions, but there was none. On the edge of the carriage seat with curiosity, she saw many of the villagers making their way down the hill toward the Cartwright Mill on the river.

"Why are they heading down there, Papa? Is there something doing on the river?"

Papa beamed. "We shall see, lass. We shall see. Whatever it is, we'll go home and prepare for it now." And off they drove, with the villagers waving and bowing as they passed.

But what about John Alex? Henrietta thought. Nobody had even mentioned him.

Once inside the house, Donald and Henrietta were told to put on simpler clothing, in Henrietta's case a plain frock of pink calico. Master Macpherson continued to give orders.

"You'll all assemble in the kitchen when you're ready. I'll drive the carriage myself."

"But where, Papa?" She knew where all the time. To the wharf and the schooner waiting there!

"We shall see that too, childie. Only hasten and prepare yourself."

When they all came trooping into the kitchen, they saw baskets on the floor and the table bulging with food. "But Papa, what . . . ?" Henrietta began.

But Papa had lined them all up before him like soldiers on drill. "We shall move off together toward the wharf. Jamie and Alexander, you may come and see what is happening there, but no farther. Next year, perhaps, when you are both older and not in danger of drowning yourselves, you may come all the way. Lucy will stay to see us off and then, with Adam, will bring back all the young ones." He turned to Donald and Henrietta. "Need I say that this day I expect to see you two behaving only as the children of Allan Macpherson should behave." Then he spoke to Rachel and Becky. "Have you provided plenty of shawls and jackets in the bags for the night air?"

The night air! Were they to be away when night came too? Henrietta wondered.

As the carriage rolled out of the yard and down the road, she

stared toward the Cartwright Mill. When she first glimpsed the schooner, not one but two masts pointed to the sky, and the sight of the sails, some already set and billowing above the water, was breathtaking.

Master Macpherson was watching Henrietta with delight. "Well, lass, what do you think of your ship. Is she trim enough for you?"

"My ship, Papa?" Henrietta said.

"Yours for today. You said you wanted a schooner trip, and we're all off on one at this moment. This is a spanking new ship built by Master Cartwright at Amherst Island, and he's leased it to me for the day to entertain my friends."

"Oh, Papa!" Henrietta exclaimed with real joy. "Who is coming?"

"There they are on the wharf," Mama said. "There's Squire Briggs and his family, Squire Campbell and his, Master Lowe and his wife, and a dozen others. Allan, I do hope we don't get a chill in the night air. Mistress Lowe is ailing, poor thing!"

"Papa, does that mean we won't come back till nightfall?" Henrietta jumped to the ground. "Where are we going?"

"We're to picnic out in Mohawk Bay. And Mama, let us have no worry about chills. This day is full of sunshine, and we shall dress to meet the evening breezes." Papa made off for the wharf.

It was all Henrietta could do to walk with decorum. She wanted to rush aboard the ship and feel the movement as it rocked at anchor beneath the willows. But Papa was there, and they followed him to greet their guests.

Fanny Briggs was agog with excitement. "How do you like my new yellow dress, Hen? Papa got it especially for today."

"It's truly beautiful, Fan," Henrietta said, but she did not see the dress at all. She was staring at the prow of the ship where a solitary figure was looking down at her. "Papa, Mama, Donald!" she shouted. "It's John Alex! He's on the ship! Papa, you didn't tell me!" With a whirl of pink skirts, she flew up the gangplank and across the deck to John Alex, calling, "How did you get here? How did you come?"

John Alex bowed gravely over her hand and kissed it. "I came up with the schooner, little cousin. Your father made all the plans."

Henrietta wanted to throw her arms around him and hug him, but a certain changed air about him held her back. The old smile was as warm and affectionate as ever and the twinkle was in the eyes, but the demeanour was that of a serious young man of affairs.

"Oh, John Alex," she said, "I have loved my mirror with the castle so much! It sits atop my dresser now, and I peek into it every day to tidy my hair."

"I think the face you see there is that of a young lady fast growing up," John Alex smiled. "That night of the skating party seems so very long ago."

"This is even better than a skating party, John Alex," she said. "Will you be with us all day?"

"All day, Henry. We have a splendid trip before us if the weather holds."

At that moment, a babble of sound flowed around them as others boarded the ship. The children ranged themselves along the rail, and the parents found places in chairs on the deck. Master Macpherson, striking the ship's bell, welcomed his guests briefly, wished them all a happy day and shouted the order to the captain to set sail. In a moment, the shout was echoed around the ship, more sails fluttered from the masts, and slowly the ship began to glide down the river.

Henrietta took her handkerchief from her pocket and waved at Lucy, Adam and the boys standing on the hill beside the mill. Then she saw the dark figure behind them. It was Joe, silently watching alone by his master's carriage. Henrietta waved harder. Perhaps he would know she was waving at him too — Joe, the slave who used to have a "big house" in a sycamore tree. She saw him suddenly raise one hand. Then he turned slowly, mounted the carriage and drove off ahead of them down the river road toward Master Lowe's mill. When they passed the mill itself in the schooner, some moments later, he was nowhere to be seen. But Henrietta was sure she had glimpsed a dark face at the topmost window.

The riverbanks glided past. Piles of lumber, apple orchards laden with fruit, and fields ripening with harvest followed one another, a parade of pictures along the shores. When Henrietta saw the pine trees smudging the limestone ridge, she tensed herself,

waiting to glance up into the tree foliage. She saw Sarah's face for only a moment, smiling down at her, the black eyes wide with wonder. Then it was gone.

"Oh, look, there is a tanager bird high in the willow tree!" Henrietta sang out.

"Where? Where?" Little Benoni Briggs, Fanny's brother, gaped where Henrietta was looking. "I don't see anything, Hen."

Fanny said, "I see nothing up there, Hen. You must be mistaken."

"Maybe," Henrietta said. Among the leaves, she saw the quick wave of a small white hand. Then she went to find John Alex.

He was the centre of the crowd of gentlemen, and the talk was all of law, election and politics. But then, in the midst of it, she heard the words "cholera in York." A sudden vision of the witch-woman and her wild toothless face came to her. She noticed the low voices of the men and the anxious glances they cast toward their wives and children as they spoke of it.

John Alex saw her and drew her affectionately to the ship's rail. "We can talk politics another day. Today I shall visit with my little cousin," he said.

"John Alex," she said, "why is Papa so worried about the government and people who don't think the way he does?"

"Why, I suppose it's because your papa is afraid such an important business will fall into the hands of irresponsible fools, and then what would happen to us all?"

Henrietta frowned. "Is that what the Reform Party and such things as Yankee Republicans are? Fools?"

John Alex looked at her, astonished. "Not quite that, Henry. The Reform Party wants changes in our government. I don't doubt that they are needed, but they must be brought about slowly and wisely, not overnight by brash and hasty action."

"John Alex," she said, "are you a friend of mine?"

"My dear girl, we are friends and cousins, are we not?" John Alex said. "Why do you ask?"

"I wondered if you would do something for me. You will be seeing much of Papa on this trip. Could you speak kindly of Master Luke Carscallion to Papa? I'm sure he's not a rebel, John Alex. His father, Old Lukey, wouldn't fight against the king and he was very nearly hanged for it."

It was John Alex's turn to frown. "Whatever can the Carscallion family have to do with you, Henry?"

"The Carscallions themselves have nothing to do with me," Henrietta said truthfully. "But oh, John Alex, 'tis so important that Papa be friends with them. I can't tell you now why it is. It's a kind of secret. But Papa should not judge someone unfairly. He is always telling Donald and me to look on all sides of a question before we speak."

"Well said!" John Alex laughed. "I do not see much of him these days to persuade him of anything, but I'll tell you a secret now. In the early winter, I shall be back in Napanee on law business and shall be in your house more often than not. I promise to speak to him then."

"Thank you, John Alex." *But early winter may be too late*, she thought. *What was to become of Sarah in the meantime, with all the talk of sending her away?* But the day was too glorious for worry. The light breeze carried them along, water foaming in the wake, sails billowing.

Some miles down the river, a sight on the bank made Henrietta stare. A woman was wringing out a patchwork quilt on the rocks — the very woman with the dark hair and sad face that Papa had taken to the Hawkins family.

"Donald," she said, "is that the farm where you helped with the barn raising?"

"Right, Hen. How did you know?"

"Don't you see the woman Papa took there? She's washing at the river."

"Mistress Cullen? She's a queer one. I didn't have much to say to her, nor she to me," Donald said. "But Mistress Hawkins says she's a wonderful help about the house and seems very grateful to have a home."

The woman, quilt still in her hand, looked up at them unblinking. Something about the look chilled Henrietta. She shivered and turned away. While she watched reapers binding sheaves in the wheat fields and a newcomer clearing an acre of pine bush, she tried to forget the face. But everywhere, the smouldering eyes seemed to burn into her like unwinking embers on the kitchen hearth.

A burst of fiddle music behind her made her wheel, startled.

The fiddler, a short jaunty fellow in long flowing red tie and leather jerkin, struck up a Scottish reel and followed it with schottisches, jigs and ballads lively enough to set every toe tapping. "He came up with me on the schooner from the bay," John Alex called to her above the smiling faces. "Another of your papa's surprises!"

Toward noon, the schooner sailed out of the mouth of the Napanee River and into the wide sparkling waters of Mohawk Bay. On their right, a small island crowded the shore, but the schooner passed it and pointed its prow to another and larger island crowned with towering pines and maples whose colour even now was touched with autumn.

Henrietta watched the shore approaching. "Mama, are we going in there?"

"There's to be a picnic, my dear," Mama smiled. "Your papa has planned it all. The picnic baskets are down in the hold, keeping the meat cold and fresh."

As they drew near the shore, some of the sails were reefed, the anchor was thrown with an enormous splash into the water, and the schooner rode on the gentle swell of the bay. Donald came up to the rail behind Henrietta. "There now, sis, don't you wish you'd joined John Huffman and me in the swimming hole up the river? You're going to have to swim it!"

John Alex patted Henrietta's head affectionately. "If we do, I think Henry and I shall have our picnic on deck with the gulls. I can't swim a stroke!"

"No need for swimming," Papa shouted to the guests. "The captain and his mate will let down the two small boats and row us ashore a few at a time. All the gentlemen will please stand by to help the ladies down the rope ladders."

Choosing to wait behind with John Alex, Henrietta stood with him watching the little rowboats bobbing across the calm water to the sandy shore of the island. When it was her turn, John Alex went first to catch her at the bottom of the ladder.

"What's the name of the island?" she asked as the shore came closer. "It looks as if no one lives here."

"'Tis Captain John's Island, little cousin. It was named after Captain John Deserontyou, an Indian leader who brought Indians to live here some years ago. He and his followers were loyal to

our king and did not want to stay in the United States when it rebelled." He pointed down the bay shore. "If you look closely among the trees, you can see the Mohawk church on the Indian Reserve. It's there that your own rector, Saltern Givens, ministers when he does not come to you."

The air on the island was fragrant with pine, but very soon, no one had a nose for anything but the delicious aroma of food from the picnic hampers. They sat on the sand or on the pine carpet under the trees, laughing and talking while they feasted. After lunch, they sang some of the old country ballads, and then Papa announced races for the children.

"May I go in one of them, Papa?" asked Henrietta.

"Why not?" Papa said. "Be sure you don't win, lass, or they'll say I arranged it."

He was jesting, but when Henrietta won the girls' race by a large margin, he wanted her to give up the prize. The guests shouted their disapproval, and in the end, he allowed her to have it, a red and blue ball strung on a stick. Henrietta was so intrigued with the toy that she did not notice John Alex sprinting across the green grass with the other men until she heard the ladies laughing. His long legs had brought him in first very easily.

"I'll accept no prize," he told Papa. "That beautiful desk you sent down to Hallowell will do for a hundred races or more." He smiled down at his cousin. "You and I had best go into politics together, Henry. Two winners against the world!"

In midafternoon, Master Macpherson announced a return to the ship. "Oh, Papa, do we have to go back so soon?" Henrietta asked.

"Not for a long time," Papa said. "We shall sail down Long Reach first and perhaps even up into Hay Bay."

Henrietta's heart leaped. "Are we going up to Grandmother Fisher's?" It had been months since they had seen Mama's mother.

"Not on this trip," Papa said. "We plan to stop at Cole's Landing where a meal is being prepared for us at the inn. Then we shall come back by moonlight."

But the clouds massing in the sky an hour after they had left the island built up with frightening speed. Suddenly a strong wind began to blow, and the ladies, alarmed, were ushered below decks by John Alex and Squire Briggs.

"Please let me stay up here, Papa," Henrietta said. "I shan't come to any harm."

Papa eyed the sky. "We shall have to put in somewhere if this keeps up," he said. At the first distant rumble of thunder, he began shouting orders, and the schooner made directly for a large wharf laden with barrels of apples from the orchards that crowned the hill. The owner of the wharf, a stout man in homespun breeches, had seen them coming and was at the waterside to greet them and help them tie up. As the first huge drops of rain began to fall, the entire party broke into a run.

"There'll never be room in the house," the farmer shouted. "Run on to the barn."

Thunder crashed and lightning lit the dusky twilight of the barn. It smelled of sweet fresh hay, and the men threw their coats down upon the hay for the ladies to sit on. When the rain showed no sign of stopping, Papa had a word with the fiddler, who at once struck up a merry reel. There was enough room for all of them on the floor, and with Papa and Mama leading, they all began to dance. Henrietta sat watching with delight. Suddenly she was aware of John Alex standing over her. He bowed gravely.

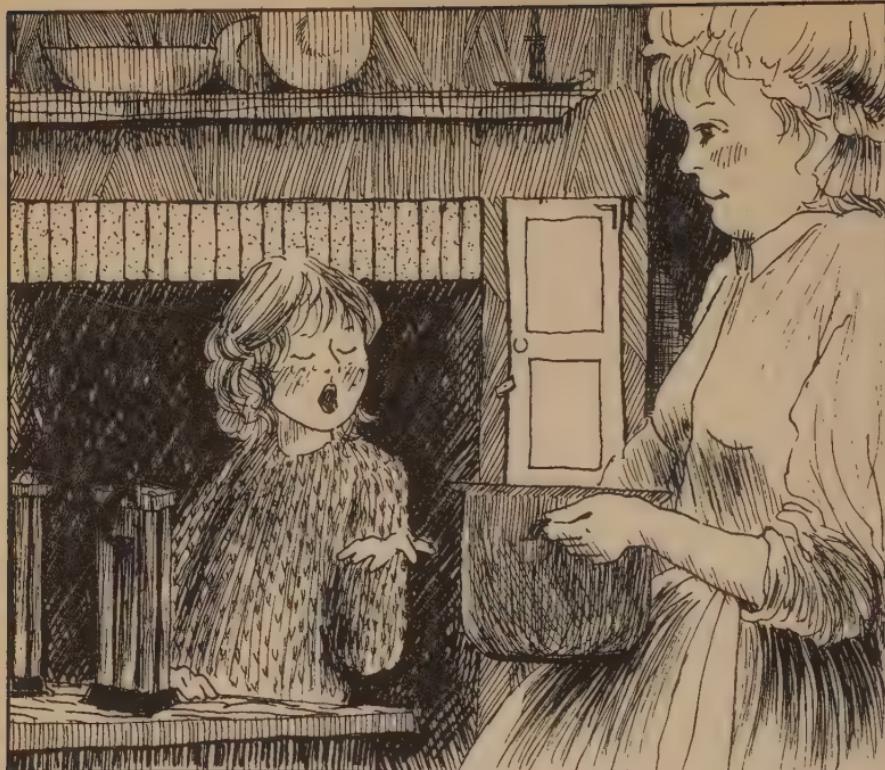
"May I have the pleasure, Miss Henrietta?" he said.

"You mean you want me . . . ?" She corrected herself hastily. "Thank you, sir, the pleasure will be all mine, indeed!" With a low curtsey, she took John Alex's arm, and together they jigged across the floor. Her heart bounded with delight.

There was even more to come. The rain, by dinner time, still dripped on the roof. Papa had the remainder of the provisions brought up from the schooner, and when they were supplemented with generous platters of fresh-baked bread and homemade cheese from the farmer's kitchen, a feast was spread in the barn.

With a slow clearing from the west, they were under sail again in the late evening. The moon coming up over the hills, as they slipped into the narrow channel of the Napanee River, silvered the pine forests and ragged clearings with enchantment. Some of the children fell asleep and were taken below decks to the cabins; others joined in quiet singing as the ship cut the water. Henrietta never left her place by the rail. She knew Sarah would be waiting. Carefully she tied her hankie to one end of the prize she had won and clutched the toy in her hand. She could see the lightning tree

silhouetted against the sky as they came close to Carscallions' wharf. Apple barrels stood here, too, just as they had on the bay, rotund dwarfs hunched together in the moonlight. Then she saw the shadow move among the barrels. It was Sarah! There was no one beside Henrietta. As the schooner came close to the wharf, she drew the ball on the stick out from under her cloak and threw it with all her might. It hit the boards with a thud and bounced away. The thin shadow came out from the barrels and gave chase. Then it disappeared up the hill toward the Carscallions' gate. Sarah had found her gift and was taking it to the tiny room under the eaves that she called home.



Chapter 18

“**Y**ou should have seen the sails when we were flying along in the storm, Alexander! Like David Hawley’s kite in the pasture on a windy day!”

“I wish I could be really old like you, Hen, so I could go places too,” Alexander said. “I’m always too young for the best things. But eight is not young. Benoni Briggs was allowed to go, and he’s just eight and a half.”

“Yes, and he fell asleep on the way home just as the moon came up.” If Henrietta closed her eyes, she could hear even now the gentle creak of the rigging and the soft swish of the ship cutting the river. It was a day she would never forget. The adventure had been told again and again all over the village, on hotel verandahs, in tavern kitchens and across the counter in Papa’s store. On Thursday morning, she found a note in the secret panel. *I saw you*, it read. *Your sails were like the white wings of my geese. I play with*

my ball in my loft room so that the boys do not take it from me. Old Lukey is teaching me new words. Please do come to Willow Castle soon.

"I caught sight of your friend today," Becky said. "She was running up through the gate as I came along the path. Who is she, miss?"

"A little lost one. Oh, please don't tell anyone about her, Beck! It's a secret, all because of Papa and the Yankee Republicans."

Becky looked bewildered. "I would never tell, miss. You can trust me. But don't get into any mischief, will you?"

The opportunities for mischief, even if it had been planned, were becoming rare. The Fall Fair in the grounds across the river came and went. Henrietta was once again allowed to go with Becky, but with no sign of Sarah, the day was a failure. A pedlar was there, crying his wares among the multicoloured booths. Henrietta bought a swatch of ribbons from him for Sarah.

"Don't get anything else from him, miss," Becky warned. "He has bought the old shanty beside Master Gibbard, the cabinet-maker, and it's as dirty a place as any I've seen!"

"What does a pedlar want with a shop?" Henrietta asked, eyeing the man's rumpled clothing.

"He buys old things, or trades new things for them. Sometimes he comes upon a thing of real value that some settler is willing to sell for ready cash. Every pioneer farmer is short of money, miss."

Within a week, Mistress Dier's School for Young Ladies opened for the fall term. Maples and oaks were heralds in court dress flanking the roadways in scarlet and bronze, as Adam drove Mapes in a jog-trot past Master Kessler's blacksmith shop.

"Just as if school had never stopped and there had been no summer vacation at all," Henrietta sighed to Adam.

"Life do go on much the same all over, miss," Adam said. "We be lucky if there is no big changes to shake our lives."

Henrietta thought at once of Sarah. But how could the Carrscallions let Sarah go when she did so much work about the place? And in the end, would Old Lukey not speak out against it?

Eleven days were to pass before she saw the mill or Willow Castle again. Then it was only because Mistress Dier gave them all a brief holiday from school while she went to Kingston to fetch some new school supplies.

It was not entirely a holiday for any of them. "We have to spend the day making a leaf collection, Beck," Henrietta said the evening before. "You will have to come and help me."

Becky, bent over a cauldron, was making candles. "Miss, I have chores to do for Rachel. I can't leave the house."

"But Papa won't allow me to go into the woods alone. You must come!" Henrietta was about to stamp her foot and then thought better of it. "Beck, I'll help with the chores and then we can both go."

"Your papa wouldn't want you working in the kitchen, miss."

"Mama once said that one thing Papa couldn't stand was an idle man," Henrietta said. "If I worked in the store, I can work here. I can help you pour the wax into the candle moulds right now. Tomorrow, I'll work the butter churn for you. And please, Beck, ask Rachel to pack us a lunch." Henrietta skipped across the kitchen. "Twill be like summer all over again!"

Certainly the day, when it came, was warm like summer. A gentle haze lay on the pine woods and the river, and over all was the pungent fragrance of wood smoke from fires stoked against the frosty October mornings. They wandered first up the bush trail toward Huffman's farm for leaves of maple and white birch, then down the road in the direction of the mill, carrying their shawls as the sun grew hot on their backs. Henrietta had brought the sampler bag along for leaves, but at the bottom was a crusty morning roll for Sarah. When they came to the millpond, Henrietta turned to Becky.

"Would you be so kind as to wait at the mill door for me, Beck? You could talk to Master Weekes if you wish. He always likes to gossip."

"Yes, miss. I'll wait." Becky, moving off toward the big mill door, stopped suddenly. "I have a secret to tell you too, miss. I do hope you can help me." As she entered the mill, Henrietta heard Master Weekes greeting her.

Whatever could Becky be talking about, she wondered. Then she forgot all about it as she saw the pale little face peering down at her from King Lukey's Arch.

"You've come!" Sarah whispered. "I've waited and waited to hear from you. Then I got your note and I was glad. I can't stay too long because I have to help the boys in the fields today, glean-

ing stubble. Alistair is away for a few days helping the Hawkinses while Master Hawkins is in the city of York welcoming his brother from the old country."

"I've wanted to tell you all about the schooner trip for so long!" Henrietta said. "Here's a roll for you to eat while we talk. Let's go to the Tower and see the world!" Up there, Henrietta told Sarah of the schooner adventure. When she came to the part about the storm and the refuge in the barn, Sarah clapped her hands.

"Oh, how I wish I could have seen it all! Do you think I shall ever go on such a trip, Henry?"

"Indeed I do! When Papa becomes friends with Master Luke, we shall all go together. And you and I shall sit up at the bow of the ship and watch the waves breaking and the wind filling the sails." She said it only to cheer Sarah and herself. It now looked as if their problem would have no end.

Sarah looked into her friend's face. "You will come whenever you can?"

"Whenever I can. It won't be as often now with school all week long, but the snow won't fly for a long time." Henrietta began to climb down Lord Liam's Stair. "I must go now, Sarah. Beck will be getting impatient."

But Becky was quite content, sitting on the other side of the mill sharing news with Master Weekes.

As they walked back slowly in silence, a sudden whirring in the bush made them fall back, alarmed, and the sky grew dark with shadow. "It's only pigeons, miss. They're massing to move off," Becky said. "They're not good for farms. They eat the crops if they settle on a field."

Where they came out of the bush, the withered corn stalks in the field beside it whispered in the light fall breeze. "Miss Henrietta," Becky began, "I was at a husking bee with Peter on Saturday night, and 'twas I who found the red ear of corn."

"Oh?" Henrietta said. "What do you do with a red ear? Save it for making the kitchen look gay?"

"Miss, you don't understand. When a young lady finds a red ear of corn at a husking, her young man is allowed to kiss her in front of everybody!"

Henrietta's laughter pealed out over the fields. "Oh, Beck, I

wouldn't like that! I should blush as red as the corn if that happened to me."

"That isn't all, miss. I found a horseshoe when I was coming down the river road yesterday morning."

"Does that mean something too, Becky?"

"Oh yes, miss," Becky said. "Good fortune to the finder."

"What do you suppose your good fortune will be, Beck?" Henrietta asked.

Becky turned away and burst into tears. "Oh, miss, I know what it is already!"

Henrietta stared at her, astonished. "Becky, whatever is the matter? What kind of good fortune makes you cry?" She pulled Becky to a mossy place under an oak tree. "Tell me all about it."

"Miss, Peter has asked me to marry him, and I'm so happy!"

"'Tis the strangest kind of happiness I've ever heard of," Henrietta said. "Why are you crying about it?"

"Miss, I don't know how to tell your papa. He will be enraged when he knows I am leaving your service. The dear Lord knows what he will say to me!"

"But Papa isn't all that bad, Beck. He will listen to reason." *Sometimes*, she added to herself, thinking of the Carscallions. "I'll tell him, Beck, and then you won't have to worry about it at all."

"Would you, miss? Oh, bless you a thousand times! You are truly the best friend I have."

Henrietta picked a leaf apart in her fingers. "Beck, that means you won't live with us anymore, doesn't it?"

"Yes, miss. I shall go and live on Peter's farm. He has everything nice for me." A smile shone through the tears.

It was Henrietta's turn to look sad. "Oh, Beck, what shall I do without you?"

"Don't be unhappy, miss. You shall come and visit us if your mama will allow it," Becky said.

"And what about the notes in the secret panel for the little lost one? How shall I send them?" Henrietta suddenly saw her whole relationship with Sarah in danger.

"Somehow, miss, we shall manage it. We shall both think hard between now and then. It will all come out right in the end, I am sure of it." Becky stood up. "I've always thought of you as my lit-

tle sister, miss, to be truthful, and I'll want to know how you're doing, even when I leave the household."

On the way home, the dust laid a film of white over their shoes as they went slowly up the river road and past the mill. Sarah was gone, but Henrietta caught a glimpse of the tanager among the leaves and heard his chirping call.

Passing the store, Henrietta saw her father absorbed in conversation with a man she had never seen before. He had obviously come a long way. His black horse, tethered to the hitching post, was covered with lather and sweat. She waved to her papa, but he was too taken up with the stranger to notice.

Henrietta spent the rest of the afternoon spreading her leaves on the morning room table and preparing the wax in the kitchen to cover them. When Donald came home from school, she showed the collection to him. "Lucky you, Hen," he said, "getting off to go hiking! I wish we could have a holiday."

As she had promised, Henrietta gave Becky a hand when the leaf collection was done: Dinner time came, and the food, hot and steaming on the hearth, was ready for the table, but Papa had not come. It was not like him to be late for a meal.

"He said nothing about any meetings," Mama fretted. She bounced Richard on her knee in the morning room. "The school board meets tomorrow night, but it's in the ballroom after dinner."

Donald fidgeted at the window. "Mama, I think I shall run down to the store and see what's keeping him. It isn't quite dark yet."

"Do hurry, son. It's strange of him not to send a message by one of the lads at the store."

Henrietta stood waiting on the back porch when Donald came gasping up the lane. "There's been some trouble. John Hosey is serving across the counter, and Papa has gone somewhere to help out. He said a messenger came for the Hawkins family this afternoon."

Henrietta remembered the horse's sweating flanks and the stranger's sombre face as she and Becky had passed the store. "What is the trouble, Donald?"

"John Hosey wouldn't tell me. We shall have to wait till Papa comes home."

"Goodness knows when that will be," Mama said. "Rachel,

please serve the dinner and keep Master Macpherson's hot in the oven."

They all ate in silence, stilled by some unknown threat to their safety. When Papa came in, his face was heavy with gloom. He kissed Mama and held the small boys to him as if the night outside held some unnamed terror.

"Mother," he said, "we've had terrible news. Edward Hawkins will not come back from York."

Mama's face went white. "Allan, was it . . .?"

"Aye, he fell in with the cholera on his visit to welcome his brother, and it's taken him. Five hundred dead of it in York alone! God save us if it isn't checked soon!"

Sadness settled over all the household. Even the little ones spoke in whispers. They all gathered close to the morning room fire as if the blaze would somehow warm their hearts as well as their bodies. Mama kept putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"What will that poor woman do? What will she do?"

"We've talked it all out, Mary," Papa said. "Mistress Hawkins is going to take her three young ones to York and make a new life there with her husband's brother and his family that's just come from England. The messenger who brought the sad news said they were expecting her."

"But, Papa," Henrietta said, "what about the woman you took there to help in the household? What's to become of her?"

"She'll have to find employment elsewhere," Master Macpherson said. "There must be people in the district who could do with her."

Henrietta spoke softly. "We could, Papa."

"Eh, what's this? We have plenty of help in this house and need no more if everyone does his duties properly," Papa said.

"Yes, Papa, but we're losing someone very soon. I know you will miss her, but you couldn't help but be happy for her, Papa."

"What are you trying to tell me, lass?" Papa asked.

"Dear Papa, Becky is going to be married to Master Peter Fairfield, and she wants your blessing on her marriage and your permission to leave service." Henrietta gave him a quick kiss on the cheek.

"Rebecca!" Master Macpherson's voice boomed into the kitchen. "Come here at this instant!"

Becky came running. She dropped a curtsey. "Yes, master?"

"Is this true what Henrietta has just told me? You're going to be married?"

Becky hung her head. "Yes, sir, it is. Truly I am sorry to put you out, Master Macpherson, but Peter does want me as his wife and soon, sir."

"Then it looks to me as if Mistress Cullen has a place for herself without looking further. Does that suit you, Mama?"

"Why, yes. I've heard she's a splendid worker, though a lonesome kind of woman. We could certainly let her try her hand at Becky's position." Mama smiled a little sadly at Becky. "But no one could really take her place, I think."

Becky's face shone. "Thank you, ma'am."

"Now, Becky, is there anything we can do for you?" Papa asked.

"Yes, master, you can marry us," said Becky. "It's always what I've had in mind, sir."

Master Macpherson smiled for the first time since his arrival home. "We shall do that with pleasure, Rebecca. And you shall be married in our own drawing room with your family and friends attending. Rachel shall prepare a fine tea for us to follow the marriage."

"Sir, you are too good to us!" Becky said. "We hope to be married in a week's time, if it suits you."

"Mistress Cullen will want to help poor Mistress Hawkins pack for her going," Mama said. "But if necessary, we can do without her for a while. We shall all have to make less work for Rachel in the meantime."

Henrietta went to her room and, in the candlelight, flung herself on her bed. Becky was really leaving for good! What would she do without her? Her tears wet the quilt. It was true there would be great pleasure in visiting her, but what about Sarah? Perhaps the new woman with the searching eyes would be her friend and help her. She was wondering with what special words she could bid Mistress Cullen welcome when she heard the knock at the back door. Papa went to open it.

A familiar voice sounded. "Good evening, sir. I have na' seen ye in a long time. Could I ha' a word wi' ye?"

"Good night, Alistair," Papa said. "Come to my study and we

can talk undisturbed. I hear that you want to ask my advice."

"Aye, sir. 'Tis a large step for me to be taking on my own, and I want the benefit o' your wisdom."

Their steps went down the hall and the study door closed, but the voices were strong and deep. In the silence of her own room, Henrietta heard every word.

"I think I know enough about farming now, sir, to take the place over on my own," Alistair said.

"The Hawkins farm is well set up," Papa said. "A good barn, some livestock. It's well situated on the river. Have you enough money to carry on?"

"Aye. I've saved every penny since I've come here. I intend to help Mistress Hawkins with the rest o' the harvest. I shall sell some of it for cash to meet her needs, and buy the rest for my own. Do I have your blessing, cousin?"

"My blessing and my money if it's needed, son. We shall stand behind you if you want to strike out on your own. You'll need to look about for a good wife to help you, you know that."

"I have one in mind, sir, but not for a while until I can prove myself on the Hawkins farm," said Alistair.

Henrietta sat staring out of the window at the spangle of stars over the pine bush. So that's the way it was to be. Alistair was going to take over the Hawkins farm and become a citizen of Napanee. Papa would be proud. The ragged cousin from Ballychroan in the Highlands of Scotland had come a long way.



Chapter 19

Dear Sarah, Becky is to be married soon. I shall not be able to send messages when she is gone. But all the while I shall be thinking of you. Do not be sad if you do not hear from me. Keep watch at Willow Castle or by the lightning tree. We shall meet again soon. Your secret friend, Henry.

Henrietta folded the little note twice and in the darkness of early morning tiptoed out of her bedroom and down the hall to the study. The panel in the desk slid back easily at her touch, and she placed the note inside, staring at it for a long moment. With Becky leaving in two days' time, she might never use the hiding place again. It was as if a little girl named Henrietta was shut away in there too, and a new, older Henrietta stood in the study.

Reluctant to close the panel, her fingers explored the darkness within for the last time. It was then they closed on the scrap of



paper. *Your kindness in waiting for payment has meant the difference between life and death for my family. If there is any way in future in which I can be of service to yours, do not hesitate to call upon Your servant, sir, Luke Carscallion.* It was the note she had found on the night she had first searched the secret compartment! She read it again, hope springing instantly in her heart. This might be the very answer! If young Master Luke saw this reminder of her father's goodness, and his own indebtedness, might he not be willing to forget all his rebel ideas and once again be friends with Papa? Then Sarah's story could be told and Sarah and the friendship saved. It was worth a try. Quickly she scribbled a postscript to Sarah's message. *Sarah. Leave this note somewhere that young Master Luke cannot fail to see it, perhaps at his supper plate. Please do as I say. This is very important!* H.M. Closing the panel, she went smiling back to her room.

On October 11, 1834, at exactly three o'clock in the afternoon, Rebecca Welkin of Napanee, otherwise known as Becky, was married to Peter Fairfield in the drawing room of Allan Macpher-

son's house. The entire household was present, even Lucy with the babies. Rachel and Adam kept Jamie and Alexander from fidgeting while the master spoke the solemn words that made Becky Mistress Peter Fairfield. Becky's parents were there, her mother in a pretty dress of brown taffeta, her father uncomfortably stiff and formal in white handmade shirt and pressed homespun breeches.

The brief ceremony was followed by a tea party, glorious to the children because it abounded in little iced cakes, and they were allowed to eat as many as they wished in honour of the occasion. During the feasting, Papa called the young couple before him and held up a little brown bag.

"Becky," he said, "I have performed many a marriage in my day as Justice of the Peace here in Napanee, but none that has given me more pleasure than this one today. This is a small token of thanks for your service to my family."

"Oh, sir! How can I thank you?" Becky curtseyed and handed the little bag to her new husband.

Henrietta knew it contained a sizeable sum of money to help them on a good start to married life.

Adam was to drive the young couple to their home down the river in the best carriage. When the time came to leave, Henrietta clung to Becky's skirts in a torrent of tears. "Oh, Beck, I can't bear to see you go! Do you really have to?"

Becky's eyes were brimming too. "Yes, miss, you know I must. But this isn't the last we shall see of one another. As soon as we're settled, I'll send word by way of your papa, and you shall come and have a long visit with me, if he will allow it."

There was a flurry of farewells, and then the carriage was driving down the road in a whirl of dust under the autumn sky, Becky waving and waving from under the hood until it was out of sight.

The following night, Mistress Cullen came to take up her duties in the household. Adam brought her up the river in the cart, her one small bag tucked under the seat. Though she arrived unsmiling, Henrietta discovered that the face beneath the deep-set dark eyes was younger than she thought. There were no smiles at the family's greeting, and she spoke seldom. When she did, it was in a strange lilting rhythm at once reminding Henrietta of Sarah. Henrietta spoke to her father about it when they had seen Mistress

Cullen settled in Becky's old room in the servants' quarters.

"Papa, where does Mistress Cullen come from?"

"With her manner of speech, childe, there's no doubt that she comes from Ireland, although she talks so little about herself that one would never really know."

From Ireland! "Papa, if someone spoke in the same way as Mistress Cullen, would they come from Ireland too?"

"I would assume so, lass. There's many an Irishman in Napanee, and they all have the same lilt," Papa said. "Why all these questions, Henrietta?"

"Oh, I just wondered, Papa."

Just wait till Sarah heard! Now they knew she had come from Ireland. Together they might discover more about that country, and who knows, even something of Sarah's family.

It was early when Mistress Cullen excused herself from the kitchen hearthside and slowly mounted the narrow steps to her room. Waiting until her father and mother were comfortably settled in the morning room, Henrietta tiptoed up the stairs. Passing through her parents' room, she listened at the doorway to the passage but heard nothing. Quietly she opened the door and slipped along the corridor and down the little steps. She saw Mistress Cullen at once. She was standing at the little window under the eaves staring down the river, a shadow of unaccountable sadness on her pale face. Henrietta went to her and took her hand.

"Mistress Cullen, I came to tell you I will be your friend. You see, Becky was very special to me, and I would like you to be too. Will you be my friend, Mistress Cullen?"

The woman turned. Suddenly, she flung her arms around Henrietta and held her close. "Arrah! I will, my dear one! I will that!" Just as suddenly, she dropped her arms to her side. "Oh, I am sorry, miss! I meant no harm."

"'Tis no harm to hug someone, Mistress Cullen. I promise I shall help you all I can," Henrietta said. But Mistress Cullen was already looking again out of the window. Henrietta tiptoed away.

For the next few days, she haunted Mistress Cullen like a ghost, but few words passed between them. It was as if the sudden burst of emotion in the room under the eaves had never been. Henrietta felt completely lost. She knew now that Becky had really gone, and things would never be the same again.

Master Macpherson announced the next day that he was planning a ball for the gentlemen of the Agricultural Society and their ladies. Mama threw up her hands in dismay, and Rachel and Mistress Cullen began a great bustle of activity throughout the house.

"What is the ball for, Papa?" Henrietta asked.

"'Tis to celebrate the splendid success of the Napanee fairs in the first year," Papa said. "You agree they were a success, lass?"

"Oh, yes, Papa. A great success." She remembered the day she first saw Sarah in the daylight on the muddy grounds across the river. "Papa, if I work hard to help this week too, may I go to the mill with you if you visit Master Weekes?"

"Indeed you may, childie. Your playtime at the mill will be growing short now, with winter coming on, so you'd best make the most of it."

On Saturday morning, Master Richard Lowe's carriage was standing in the mill yard when they arrived. "He's come to see me about plans for the new church," Papa said. "It will be built very soon, lass, and 'tis to be called St. Mary Magdalen."

Henrietta stared about for signs of Sarah. "Where will it be built, Papa?"

"On Thomas Street in the clearing to the northwest of our own house. No excuse for being late for worship then, eh, lass?" He handed her Mapes's reins. "Tie up the horse, daughter. I'll not keep Master Lowe waiting."

Henrietta looped the reins through the ring on the hitching post and set off for the other side of the mill. She was startled to find Joe around the corner, basking in the sunshine.

He bowed and smiled. "How you, missy?"

"Very well, thank you, Joe." She gazed at the willow bordering the pond. "The leaves will soon be off all the trees, won't they?"

Joe came closer and whispered, "Missy, soon you ain't gonna have no hidin' place."

"I know," Henrietta said.

"I think of a good place, missy. You want to go on meetin' yo' friend?"

"Oh, yes, Joe! Where is it? Please do tell me!"

"Come with me, missy." Joe went round the corner of the mill and pointed to a door set low in the wall. "That lead to the shaft that turn the millstone, missy. Massa Weekes only come here when

somethin' wrong. He keep extra sacks in there too."

Henrietta looked up into the black face. "Joe, it's a wonderful hiding place. I thank you with all my heart."

"That's a'right, missy. I had me a place in a tree once too. My 'big house.' I had me no place to go when they cut down my tree." He smiled at her, then walked slowly away around the corner of the mill and out of sight. Henrietta heard Master Lowe calling to him and the rumble of the carriage wheels as they drove off.

She sped over to Willow Castle where the leaves still veiled the branches. She saw Sarah's black skirt as soon as she reached the Duke of Napanee's Dungeon.

Sarah's first words were despairing. "Henry, the leaves are all going from the trees. We shall soon have no more Willow Castle. What shall we do then?"

"Old Joe has told me, Sarah. Come with me." They scurried through the yellowing grasses to the door in the mill wall.

"Henry, 'tis just the right place for us," Sarah whispered.

Henrietta pulled her to the ground on one of the sacks. "Not only that. I've found out where your home must have been, Sarah, before you came on the great ship."

Sarah stared at her. "You have?"

"It was Ireland. What do you think of that?"

"But that's where Old Lukey came from before he went to the colonies," Sarah said. "That's what he has told me many times."

"Then perhaps he knew your mother and father. Everybody here in the village knows everybody else."

"Perhaps he did!" Sarah's eyes shone. Then the light went from her face. "He would never remember. His memory gets worse and worse, and he is so muddled in his speech and thinking that it is hard to make head or tail of him these days. The only time he makes sense is when he's teaching me to read and write." She smiled again. "Still, 'tis a wondrous thing to know I came from Ireland. Do you suppose that is why young Master Luke picked me up in Montreal, when nobody wanted me, because I came from Ireland?"

"It could be," said Henrietta. "And surely because of that he would never send you away."

Sarah hid her face in her hands. "With all the happiness, I almost forgot. I have something terrible to tell you."

Henrietta's heart seemed to thump as loudly as the mill wheel.
"What is it, Sarah?"

"I really am going away. I think there is no doubt of it now."

"What do you mean?" Henrietta pulled Sarah's hands away from her face and wiped the tears with her own skirt.

"Last week, a lady and a gentleman came by coach. I think they are distant relatives of Master Luke's from a village near York."

"What did they want?" asked Henrietta.

"They came to see if they wanted me. I had to curtsey before them and answer questions about many things. Then they asked me how I would like to live with them in a grand big house, and go to school and learn to be a young lady." Sarah, throwing herself on the sacks, sobbed as if her heart would break. "Oh, Henry, I do not want to leave this place. I would never see you or Willow Castle again! What shall I do?"

"But what about the note I sent you for young Master Luke? Did he not see it?"

"Yes," said Sarah. "I know he did. I was watching from the hearth when he picked it up from beside his plate. He looked truly astonished and puzzled to see it there. When he had read it, he put it carefully in his breeches pocket and said nothing. Nothing at all! Don't you see, Henry? He and your papa will be enemies forever, and I shall have to go."

Henrietta clutched Sarah's hands fiercely. "They shall not take you, do you hear me? I shall stop it somehow. I shall, Sarah, I promise." She stroked the long tangled black hair. "There, there now. Don't cry anymore."

"I did not even like them, Henry. The gentleman had hard thin lips and spoke so sternly, and the lady seemed so unhappy and never once smiled," Sarah said. "I have to work hard at the Car-scallions, but young Master Luke is good to me, and there is laughter there. And of course Old Lukey loves me. 'Tis like home to me now."

"Did they say when they would come again?" Henrietta asked.

"No, they are to let Master Luke know by the post."

"You must get in touch with me at once if anything else happens," Henrietta said earnestly.

"Yes, but how, if Becky is not passing the lightning tree to carry messages?"

Henrietta drew forth a swatch of ribbons from her sleeve. Sarah's face brightened. "For me?" she asked.

"For you," Henrietta said. "I bought them from the pedlar at the fair."

"I could not go," Sarah said sadly. "I was serving the helpers at the threshing bee, and Master Luke said he had no wish to run into your papa again." She stroked the shiny smoothness of the red and green silk. "They are beautiful. What shall I do with them?"

"You could put one in your hair. It would look very pretty," Henrietta said. "But if you are in trouble and you need me, tie a red one to a lower branch of Willow Castle, and I shall find it when I come to the mill with Papa."

"Then nothing can happen to me unless you know of it!" Sarah said.

"Do you see? There is no need to worry anymore." Henrietta spoke with a confidence she was far from feeling. "Now let me tell you all about Becky's wedding and the new woman who has come to take her place." With so much news to tell, it was easy to take Sarah's mind from the fears at hand, even if she could not take her own. Her disappointment that the note from long ago had failed to do its work was almost more than she could bear.

Preparations for the ball went on all week. Adam delivered the invitations in the windstorm that carried the leaves off all the trees. Henrietta stood under the eaves in the workroom and peered out of the window, trying to see if the lovely hiding places of Willow Castle were secret no longer. She could just barely catch the waving tip of Sir John Alexander's Tower, and there was not a leaf left on it. When Donald went to the mill in place of her father the following Saturday and invited her to go with him, she was deeply thankful for the sack shed below the hill. She found Sarah there when she arrived, her bright black eyes watching from the darkness.

"I knew you'd come today. I had a feeling about it," Sarah said. "Oh, Henry, our bird is gone! He has flown away. I knew as long as he was here we would have good fortune. But now I am afraid."

There was uncertainty in Henrietta's laughter. "You sound like Becky, Sarah, with your superstitions. Our scarlet prince has just gone to find a warm place to stay. Look what I have brought for

you — cakes from the kitchen that are made for the ball on Tuesday. Rachel let me have some."

"Is the grand big ball Tuesday then?" Sarah asked. "I do so wish I could see all the fine ladies in their silk gowns and furs."

"I could arrange it if Becky were still with us, Sarah," Henrietta said, "but I don't know much about the new lady. Wait a bit and I'll see if she can keep secrets the way Becky did."

"Ssh! I hear someone coming!" Sarah said.

"Under the sacks in the corner!" Henrietta whispered. They were covered quickly, the ground cold and damp to their bodies. The low door opened, and a shaft of light shone in the dark. It was Master Weekes, whistling tunelessly. He threw in a bundle of sacks that landed exactly upon them, closed the door and walked away. They came up for air, stifling laughter.

"Did you ever see such a thing?" Henrietta giggled. "Right on top of us and he didn't know we were there!"

"You know, I think we shall have just as much fun here as in Willow Castle," Sarah said, all smiles again. "Oh, I feel happy indeed today, Henry! There has been no word more from the lady and gentleman. Master Luke says it appears that they have thought better of it and do not want me after all."

"I knew it! I just knew it!" Henrietta said. "Everything will come out right after all."

On Tuesday afternoon, the day of the ball, Master Macpherson came home from the store early, bringing his new suit from the tailor's. He stood admiring his splendour in the hall mirror.

"Oh, lass," he called to Henrietta, "I almost forgot to tell you. John Hosey said you must have lost one of your ribbons when you were playing at the millpond. It was caught on one of the willow branches. You'll find it in the left-hand pocket of my workaday vest." He frowned down on her. "'Tis time you were a little more careful with your clothes, young lady."

"Yes, Papa." Henrietta spoke in a whisper. She had no need to seek out the ribbon. She knew what it was. Her heart raced as she took it from the pocket. What did it mean? Was the message an urgent one? How was she to see Sarah to find out?

At that moment, Mistress Cullen came in from the kitchen. "I have a favour to be begging of you, master," she said.

"Yes, Mistress Cullen, what is it?" Papa asked.

"Mistress Hawkins is leaving by schooner for York tomorrow morning, before freeze-up comes. I am wondering, if I set out the food for Rachel, may I be leaving this evening to walk down the river road to say good-bye?"

Master Macpherson frowned. " 'Tis a great pity it must be tonight, Mistress Cullen. On any other day, Adam could have taken you, but I need him to stable the guests' horses."

"I know, master, but when a body like me is all alone in the world, she learns to put all fears behind her and do things for herself."

"Well, then, if you have done your work for Rachel, you may go. The guests will serve themselves at the buffet after the dancing." Papa called to Rachel. "Rachel, have Adam make a lantern for Mistress Cullen, a big one, so she may see her way well."

Henrietta knew at once what she would do. There was no danger in going down the river road at night if she followed in the wake of Mistress Cullen and her light. Now she could only hope that Sarah might be found somewhere about the lightning tree.

With the coming of darkness, the Macpherson house was ablaze with light. New candles flickered in the wall sconces, and torches shone from the brass holders on the front porch. Henrietta peeked down the hall to see the arrival of the first guests, Squire Briggs and his wife. Then she heard the back door open softly and saw Mistress Cullen leave. Rushing to her own wardrobe, she flung her cloak about her shoulders, donned her wool bonnet and carefully, without a sound, opened the door and followed her.

Somewhere across the river a dog howled. Shivering, Henrietta never took her eyes off the lantern in Mistress Cullen's hand. An owl hooting at the millpond very nearly made her cry out with surprise. At the same moment, a branch snapped under her feet. Mistress Cullen stopped and looked back. But Henrietta was behind the trunk of Willow Castle and for the moment safe. As she crept down the path, the river whispered beside her, sad perhaps that it would soon be hushed for the long white winter. The lightning tree was a stark landmark pointing to the sky. She slid behind it as they came up to its ragged trunk, and watched Mistress Cullen's lantern winking on up the river in the darkness. Only a moment later, little feet padded down the hill from Carscallions' gate.

She could almost feel the wide black eyes burning into her.

"Is that you?" the small voice said.

"Yes, Sarah, it's me." Henrietta flung her cloak around the shivering child. "What is it? Tell me quickly!"

"A letter came today. They will come for me early in December. Our bird has flown away. Now I shall fly away too, and we shall see one another never again." The hopelessness in Sarah's voice clutched at Henrietta's heart like a hand of ice.

"Sarah, you must not speak that way! I told you I would look after you. December is a month away, and before then, anything might happen to change things. If it doesn't, I shall make it happen."

"Do you really think you can stop me from going away?"

"Of course! Of course! Only wait and see." Henrietta pulled the cloak more closely about them. "Don't think of it anymore. Let's remember all the happy days we had in Willow Castle and plan what we shall do when we go there in the spring."

But there was little time. Too soon they saw the lantern glowing in the dark on the ridge. Sarah clung to Henrietta as if it were their last meeting, then flew up the hill just as the light shone past the tree. Slipping into the shadows, Henrietta followed Mistress Cullen home. The lights still shone out into the cold autumnal darkness, and there were dancing feet and laughter overhead, but she had no heart for peeking. She thought only of the little hands, ice cold in her own. It was very nearly the end of October. If something was to be done it must be done soon, or Sarah would be gone forever.



Chapter 20

“**W**here’s my lass?” Papa’s voice boomed down the hall.

Henrietta bounded out of the kitchen.
“Here I am, Papa.”

“Have I not told you to stay away from the kitchen?” Papa frowned. “Your chatter interferes with the servants’ work.”

“But I wasn’t interfering, Papa. I was helping. Mistress Cullen and Rachel are making the dye for your study curtains from the white maple bark, and I was stirring the pot over the hearth for them.” She did not tell him that she was also plying Mistress Cullen with questions about her past and getting few replies.

“I’m on my way to Master Gibbard, the cabinetmaker. Do you want to come in the carriage with me?”

“Oh, Papa, I would love that! Wait till I fetch my bonnet and cloak.” Master Gibbard’s shop was on the river road beyond the



mill, and she might see Sarah there.

The hood of the carriage was up against the cold November wind as they jogged along. The landscape was brown and bleak, the last of the withered leaves scudding across the horse's hooves. The forests around the village wore the brown-grey shades of the dye in the cauldron at the kitchen hearth, and patches of ice were beginning to form at the river's edge.

"Are you warm enough, childie?" Papa asked.

"Yes, Papa." Feeling at her feet the heat of the stone that Rachel had warmed in the oven, she thought of Sarah, waiting perhaps in the sack shed and shaking with the bitter weather. If only there were some excuse for stopping at the mill! But with Papa intent on the cabinetmaker's, she could think of none.

Master Gibbard greeted them with a bow. The good clean fragrance of cedar and pine shavings filled his shop. Cupboards, tables, benches and chests stood all around them in various stages of completion. He had been sanding down a beautiful butternut clock case when they arrived. Pushing it gently aside, he went be-

fore them to a room behind the shop. It was piled high with many kinds of wood and some finished furniture. In the midst of it all stood a cutter, shining black, with crimson upholstery.

"How do you like it, lass?" Mr. Macpherson asked.

Henrietta frowned. "Like it, Papa?"

"The cutter, childie. It's the new one Master Gibbard has made for us."

"Oh, 'tis truly beautiful, Papa! I especially like the crimson velvet," Henrietta said.

"I thought you would." Papa turned to Master Gibbard. "We shall fetch it at the beginning of the week."

"Yes, sir. There's still a little work to be done on the runners and a stitch or two to put in the lining," said Master Gibbard.

With a word about the weather and the state of affairs in Napanee, they parted from him, mounted the carriage and turned the horse around.

"Papa, what is that place beyond Master Gibbard's?"

Henrietta peeked from behind her blue bonnet at a flimsy dilapidated shed standing far back in a field. It reminded her very much of the witch-woman's place, but while hers seemed to grow out of the rock and the wild things of the forest, this was a dirty shambles with heaps of old pots and pans, broken furniture and even ragged clothing cluttering the yard before the door.

Papa did not deign to look at the tumbledown house. "'Tis a disgrace to the river road," he said shortly. "Some fly-by-night pedlar has come to set up business there, hoping to make his riches out of other people's misfortunes."

Henrietta remembered suddenly what Becky had told her about the pedlar at the Fall Fair, but she questioned her father no further.

"Papa," she said brightly, "have you ordered a new cutter for any special reason? 'Tis a real beauty!"

"Wait till the river freeze-up and you shall find out, lass," Papa told her. "We have a trip or two to take when the ice makes the going easy."

On the Monday night following, intense cold came pouring out of the north, and the river was stilled, powdered white with snow. All the hearths in the house were kept blazing, but even then, the water froze in the kitchen pitchers overnight, and by morning,

the bedclothes were quite stiff. As Mistress Cullen brought the warming pan in the evening to heat her bed, Henrietta thought of Sarah in her frigid, unheated attic room. She hoped that somewhere she had found a cloak warmer than the thin shawl she had worn at their last meeting. But then it had not been the temperature alone that had set the thin little body shivering.

Midweek, Master Macpherson came out of his study, ushered a gentleman concerned with a boundary dispute to the front door, and came to take tea in the morning room.

"Well, my dear ones," he said, "it appears to me that the weather will hold, and we may take the trip in our new sleigh on Saturday."

"Trip, Papa?" Alexander asked. "Where to? I've never heard anything about a trip."

Papa leaned back in his chair. "Do you not think it is high time we went to see Grandmother Fisher and Uncle Jonathan?"

"Papa, do you mean we're going to sleigh to Hay Bay?" Behind him, Henrietta flung her arms around his neck. "It's been months since we've been!"

"Yes, and my poor dear mama wondering what's become of us," Mama sighed.

"Now, Mother," said Papa, "you know it's impossible for me to get away in the summer with new settlers arriving and heavy work at the mill, to say nothing of trade at the store. If your mama does not understand, I'm quite sure your brother Jonathan does."

"I suppose so," Mama said, "but I do miss my old home on the bay, and I know Mama is lonesome since Papa passed away."

Henrietta went to put her hand in hers. "Never mind, Mama, the week will fly, now we know we're going."

Saturday's dawn was cold and cloudy with a wind blowing from the southwest. Lucy stood at the window, one baby in her arms and one at her feet. Rachel and Adam helped to bundle the rest of the family beneath the bear robes in the sleigh. The children waved and waved at the servants until the house was out of sight, and the cutter, light and swift, slipped down the hill and onto the river ice below the falls. Some of the village children were already gliding on the millpond with their homemade wooden skates. Henrietta stared all about the mill for a glimpse of Sarah, but there was none. With sudden panic she remembered that it was very

close to the arrival of the people from York. Were the Carscallions forbidding Sarah to wander in case they came early? Had they already come? But there was no red ribbon flying from Willow Castle, not a trace. Nevertheless, a cloud of anxiety shadowed her day.

As they passed the cabinetmaker's shop, Master Gibbard waved at them from the window, eyeing the sleigh with some pride. The pedlar's place beside him was silvered over with the light snowfall, somehow looking less untidy as a result. The mounds in the field before the house took on fantastic fairy shapes quite unlike the ugly junk that lay beneath the snow.

As the sleigh ran on down the river past the lightning tree, Henrietta looked intently at the Carscallion farm. But there was no sign of Sarah; there was only one of the Carscallion men, far up on the hill chopping wood, who stared at them as they swept by. Papa turned the other way.

When they left the shelter of the riverbanks and came out onto the frozen expanse of Mohawk Bay, the wind blew more strongly. To the westward, Captain John's Island rode the frozen waste, a pine-masted ice-bound bark in an Arctic sea. Like the ice, the Indian Church shone white among the cedars on the shore beyond.

As they flew down Long Reach, the sun, shining briefly, made the long narrow waterway into the larger Bay of Quinte a shining corridor of light, walled on either side by glistening snow-covered hills.

"Papa, my face is cold and my feet are freezing," Alexander complained.

"We are all in need of a warming," Papa said. "We shall stop at Cole's Landing and call in at the inn for a hot drink."

They sat before a crackling fire and drank hot chocolate and tea. Henrietta stared, wide-eyed, all about her, noting every detail of the scene to tell Sarah. Sarah could not be gone. She would meet her again in the sack shed, she was sure of it. They sat on benches before a low wooden table. On a wide hutch upon a butternut chest, dishes and crockery jostled one another in crowded confusion. Above the fireplace was an enormous picture of gentlemen in scarlet coats all on horseback. "Fox hunting," Papa explained. "'Tis a popular sport among the gentry in England."

While they grew sleepy with warmth, two travellers entered, blowing on their hands and shouting for a groom to stable their horses.

"'Tis time we went to find our own," Papa said, and they all rose.

Papa had had the groom reheat the stones from the sleigh on the hearth; once on the way again, it was good to feel their warmth on the feet. It seemed no time at all until they skimmed along the bay shore and saw the handsome farmhouse of Grandmother Fisher. Grandmother herself, who had been watching from the window, welcomed them with tears in her eyes.

"My dear Mary, your little ones have grown beyond all belief! And you, Allan, how do all your enterprises go, and the business of justice?" Her own husband, Henrietta's grandfather, had been a judge like Papa, before his death, and also a successful farmer.

"All well, madame," Papa replied with a bow. "I grow busier with the years, and age slows me down a little, or we should have been here sooner."

"Come into the kitchen now, and tell me everything that's happened since last we saw you. Jonathan is at the barn, but he'll be up when he sees your cutter!" Grandmother drew them into the warm comfortable kitchen. The pumpkins drying above the hearth glowed like the firelight.

Uncle Jonathan, a big quiet man with a slow smile and a deep voice, came in a moment later. "Where are my two boys?" he asked. They ran to him and he took one on each knee. "I have a surprise for you both from Kingston town if you are good."

"Oh, we are good!" Jamie cried out. "We are never naughty. Are we, Alex?"

"Well, hardly ever," Alexander said. "Please show us, Uncle Jonathan."

"What do you say, Donald? Are they well enough behaved to have a gift?"

"I don't stay about long enough to see," Donald grinned. "Papa is training me to the store and the mill, and that, with my schoolwork, keeps my nose to the grindstone."

"Just where an ambitious young man's nose should be." Uncle Jonathan reached into a box on the mantel. "Here are two ponies to gallop-a-trot you home." He handed them two identical well-

formed horses made of cast iron. One was grey, the other black.

Later, before the fire, he sang Christmas songs in a rich baritone voice, and they all joined in. Then, while they chatted after dinner, the small boys fell asleep in Grandfather's big armchair, lulled by the warmth and their own weariness.

When Papa began to talk to Uncle Jonathan of the election that had taken place in the fall, Grandmother beckoned to Henrietta.

"Yes, Grandmother?"

"I have a little gift for you too, dear child. Come with me to my sewing room," Grandmother said. There she passed a half-finished quilt in its frame and reached for her rosewood sewing box. She turned to Henrietta with something in her hand. "Now that you're growing up to be such a young lady," she smiled, "I think it's time you had your great-grandmother's thimble." She put it gently into Henrietta's hand, a beautiful miniature work of art with tiny silver bells carved all around the rim.

"Oh, Grandmother, it's beautiful!" Henrietta exclaimed. "Did it really belong to your mother?"

"It did, child. I brought it here with me from the colonies."

"I shall treasure it always," Henrietta said. "Where did your mother live, Grandmother?"

"She came from England to settle in the colonies which are now called the United States of America. Your grandfather and I came to live here in Upper Canada because we had no wish to stay there and fight against our king."

"You are not Yankee Republicans, then?" Henrietta asked solemnly.

"What's this?" Uncle Jonathan's laughter rang out across the room. "Allan, these children of yours know more than we give them credit for."

"I'd prefer them to know nothing about Yankee Republicans or rebels either," Papa said. "With the Reform Party now having the upper hand, heaven knows what disaster lies ahead for the country!"

Disappointment rose in Henrietta. She could not dare mention the Carscallion name even here without a storm of abuse following.

"Grandma, did you come to Upper Canada in a fine carriage with a horse like mine in the harness?" Alexander asked. He gal-

loped his toy across the braided rug.

Grandmother laughed. "My sakes no, son. We came by boats up the long rivers and into Adolphustown with the rest of the settlers. There was much hardship in those days, with even the women and children sleeping out on the hard cold ground until the lots were given out and the men could chop homes out of the wilderness."

Looking around the broad comfortable room, Henrietta found it difficult to believe in hardship. While the boys popped corn at the fire, she went to look into the wise, kind eyes of her grandfather in the portrait over the bureau. Then she heard the knock at the door and saw Uncle Jonathan go to open it. When she heard the familiar voice, she shouted, "Papa, it's John Alex!" and arrived at the door in time to see a cutter driving away in a whirl of snow.

John Alex stood on the mat smiling down at her. "Surprised?" he said. "I told you I'd be coming back to Napanee on business, and your good papa has asked me to stay with you and your family."

"Oh, John Alex, it will be the best Christmas we've ever had!" Then the thought of Sarah cut like a sword through her happiness, and the smile left her face. But with John Alex in the household to work his kindly influence on Papa, was there not now some hope?

The day passed with laughter and singing and a visit to Uncle Jon's barn, where the boys lingered over the enormous sow and the grey pony.

It was deepening dusk and the air very still when the farewell shouts rang out over the frozen bay and Grandmother stood framed in the candlelit doorway fading into the distance behind them. The children and Mama, weary with the long day, rode for the most part in silence, while Papa and John Alex exchanged views in low tones on Uncle Lowther and the land tax.

As they rounded the point and came up into Long Reach, the wind, funnelled between the hills, flung itself at their faces with the first soft flakes of snow. By the time they reached the mouth of the Napanee River, the snow was settling in drifts across the ice, and Meg and Bonnie Prince, heads bent, moved only by instinct in the direction of home. Tense and silent, Henrietta stared into the teeth of the blizzard, aware of candlelight shining dimly

from settlers' cabins on the riverbanks and of the once beautiful shapes of trees now looming over them like snow-shrouded giants.

Then suddenly the whole world was tipping upside down. The boys, half asleep under the bear robes, began to wail, Mama was screaming, and Papa was shouting orders at the top of his voice. John Alex stood by in snow to his knees begging them all to remain calm. The cutter had overturned in a snowbank.

"Where are we?" Papa demanded. He shook the snow furiously from his whiskers and glared at them all through the darkness. "The weather could have saved its fury for another day instead of embroiling us in this state."

"Allan, the Carscallion farm is just up over the hill," John Alex said.

Henrietta's heart leaped.

"If we have to stay here the night, we'll not go there for help," Master Macpherson said.

Henrietta, somewhat astonished, heard John Alex's firm voice rising above the wind. "Allan, at this moment, I dare to express the opinion that the comfort of your wife and little ones matters more than differences over politics. I shall go and get help."

He had gone scarcely a dozen feet when they heard voices. It was young Master Luke followed by his son James. He doffed his cap and nodded in a friendly fashion.

"We saw you go down the river early this morning," he said, "and we've been worried for your safety ever since eventide. We'll take you all home in the big sleigh. It's made for heavier travelling than the cutter. You can hitch your sleigh and horses on behind."

"Indeed!" said Papa. "Indeed, sir!" But there was no shouting about reformers or Yankee Republicans.

Then Henrietta saw Sarah. She was in the snow shadows, beyond the reach of the lantern light; so close and yet not a word must pass between them. But Sarah was still at the farm. With that, at least for now, Henrietta would have to be content. All the way home, Sarah rode at the end of the sleigh behind all the others. When Henrietta jumped to the ground in the lane beside the house, Sarah stared at her, unsmiling, her heart in her eyes.

Rachel, Lucy and Adam, all out with lanterns, had been looking down the river. "Praise God! Praise God!" Rachel said over and over. Lucy wept with relief, and Adam worked out his delight by

helping them all down from the sleigh and into the house. But it was Mistress Cullen, standing silently in the door, who gathered the children into her arms.

"I thought I was after losing you too! I thought I was, truly!" she kept saying.

Henrietta tore herself away to watch Sarah, hidden behind Master Luke, disappear down the river road. If only Sarah could know that the night had brought hope! John Alex was here to plead for them, and young Master Luke had done Papa a kindness. It was because of the note from the secret hiding place, she was sure of it. Now Papa could never look upon him with disfavour again.

By the glow of the hearth, Mistress Cullen undressed the boys and slipped them into their warm nightgowns. Later, when Henrietta had crept exhausted into the bed beneath the canopy, she felt rather than heard someone in the room. It was Mistress Cullen gently tucking her in, all the while crooning a sweet sad song as if she were once again a little child in need of a lullaby.



Chapter 21

From the moment of John Alex's arrival, the household took on a festive air. The day following the misadventure in the snow, Mistress Cullen helped the young boys to gather garlands of cedar to decorate the house for Christmas. They ran to her readily now for everything, and she took them with her on frequent walks along the village streets.

"She likes to stand and watch children, Hen," Alexander said. "Whenever there's a crowd of them playing I can scarcely pull her away."

"It's because she loves them so," Henrietta said. "Anybody can tell that."

In her own thoughts now, Sarah was ever present. She waited impatiently for Papa to speak a kindly word of Luke Carscallion but none came. "John Alex," she said fretfully, "is Papa still at

odds with Master Luke, even after the help he gave us?"

"I think not as much as he was, little cousin, but your papa is a man of great pride, and an older tree finds it a little harder to bend with the wind."

She wanted to catch at his hand and shout, *But there isn't time to wait, John Alex! It's nearly the first of December!* Instead she turned away and said sadly, "I see."

"What's up, little cousin?" John Alex took her chin in his long fingers. "Don't let your papa's politics make you unhappy. I have a secret to share with you."

"A secret?" How she longed to share her own! But there was too much danger in that.

"Yes, in a week's time, there's to be a masque in the ballroom."

"A masque? What is that, John Alex?" Henrietta asked.

"It's a kind of pageant, or play, and although it, too, has some politics in it, you don't need to be concerned with that," John Alex said.

"I? But how would I have anything to do with it, John Alex?"

"Why, Henry, don't you want to have a part in it? Your old cousin John Alexander is writing and producing it!"

Henrietta gaped at him. "Do you mean to say I am to be in a play dressed in a costume and speak real words?"

"I wouldn't expect you to speak any other kind," John Alex laughed. "We've already had some rehearsing at Quackenbush's Tavern and Tom Ramsay's Store, but we've saved a part especially for you."

"Don't keep me guessing, John Alex! What am I to be? Do tell me, please!"

"How would you like to be a page boy to the queen, dressed in green velvet breeches, scarlet cape and gold cap?" John Alex asked.

"A queen? Why, then, if there is a queen, there must be a castle," Henrietta said.

"It is all to take place at the castle hearthside at Christmastide, Henry."

"Oh, John Alex, if only . . ." She stopped short, the longing almost more than she could bear. Here they were, preparing a play about a castle, and Sarah would never see it.

"If only what, little cousin?" John Alex bent over her. "Is some-

thing troubling you? Remember, I'm in the right place to give you legal advice."

She knew he was jesting, but how she longed to ask for it! Yet, there was too much risk involved for Sarah.

"No, there is nothing you can help me with, John Alex. And I am truly grateful to you for saving the part of the page boy for me. Can you tell me anything about the play?"

"Tom Ramsay, Donald Stuart and I have put it all together. It pokes a little fun at the government and its tormentors."

Henrietta looked alarmed. "Oh, John Alex, will Papa allow you to laugh at the government?"

"Your papa enjoys a hearty laugh as much as anyone else, Henry, and it does us good to laugh at ourselves once in a while. My friends will be coming over to rehearsal here in a few days. Your papa said we could hold it in the ballroom, and he is to invite Squire Campbell and Squire Briggs and their wives, Master Richard Lowe and his, and many more to see it."

With John Alex's casual mention of Master Richard Lowe, the idea came at once. What a wonder she had not thought of it before! The name conjured up the image of a black face peering up at them beneath Willow Castle, the face of a slave. But if there were slaves in Upper Canada, why could not she, Henrietta, offer young Master Luke a sum of money for Sarah and thereby set her free? She was sure Master Luke needed the money. There was not a pioneer farmer in Upper Canada who didn't — that's what Becky had said. Surely the lady and gentleman from the village near York were prepared to pay a price for Sarah. The Carscallions would never let her go for nothing. Was Sarah not like a slave, doing all the scrubbing and fetching in the Carscallion home for no wage whatsoever? But how was she, Henrietta, to find any money, let alone enough to interest Master Luke? Papa had a great deal of money, she knew that, but to ask him for it was out of the question. To think of it made her tremble. No, somehow, somewhere, she must find it herself, and soon.

When John Alex's friends arrived in the house for rehearsal, it was just like old times. Laughter flowed down the corridors. Donald Stuart was to be a fine lord and Tom Ramsay a knight with his heraldry wrought in iron upon his shield. Some of the aunts and cousins whom John Alex knew in Kingston were to

come up to Napanee to take part in the masque. Plans were already in the making to carry the entire company of players down to Glenora and the Stone Mills where John Alex's own parents worked and lived.

Much of the wit and wisdom of the dialogue was far over Henrietta's head, but she loved the bowing and curtseying, the challenging of heroes and the clash of sword and buckler that were all part of the play. When her turn came, she was to bend low before John Alex, newly knighted for valour by the lady of the castle, and say, "I am at your service, my lord. What is your command?"

She did it so well the first time that the company cheered. "We shall come back next year," John Alex declared, "and you shall be our queen."

Henrietta had to go to bed long before the merrymaking was done. She could hear them all still roaring with laughter as they consumed the tea and biscuits Rachel took to them later.

As always, her last thought before sleep was of Sarah. Time was running out. Early in December, Sarah had said, and that could be any time once Monday had come and gone. She lay watching the candlelight, thinking again of the adventures they had shared, of the view from Sir John Alexander's Tower, of the witch-woman, of the joy on Sarah's face as she ate the little iced cakes. She saw her now in the flames on her own hearth, flying down the river road with her bare feet and streaming black hair, or swaying on a branch of Willow Castle with a scarlet bird on her shoulder. *What if one day she went to find Sarah in the sack shed under the mill, and she was not there? What if she should never be there again?* Henrietta sat up in bed, jolted by the stark truth — that even her last plan of paying Master Luke for Sarah could get nowhere because she had not, nor ever would have, any money of her own. A great longing swept over her to race now along the river road in the snow-light, rescue Sarah, and bring her safely home. Instead, she turned on her pillow and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Arrah, my dear sweet one, what is the trouble that's after you now?" Mistress Cullen had come in to put out the candle.

"Oh, Mistress Cullen, 'tis such a sad cruel world, and there's

nothing I can do about it, nothing at all!" She burst into a fresh torrent of tears.

"Why, my dear one, it is truly. But you should not be finding it out so young in years. Is there anything at all I can do about it for you?"

"No, nothing at all," she sobbed. "You see, Papa still thinks the Carscallions are Yankee Republicans and rebels, even though they pulled us out of a snowbank. He'll never change. I know it! So I can't tell you about anything, and I know she'll be gone and I'll never see her again."

Mistress Cullen's arms came round her and held her close. "There now, colleen, the saints bless you! Don't you ever be giving up hope, whatever it is! Somehow, some day, it will all come out right again. If I hadn't thought that myself, I'd never have been able to go on living." She began to sing, the voice, low and sweet, crooning on and on in the light of the fire and the candle's shadows. Worn out with the excitement of the masque and her own torn emotions, Henrietta slept.

Mama was the one who wakened them the following morning. "There's a house cricket!" she called. "I've heard him all through the night! Rachel! Mistress Cullen! Lucy! We shall have to turn out all the drawers and cupboards to find him or he'll devour all the clothes."

Henrietta heard the cheerful sound herself when she awoke. She was sorry that Mama felt it necessary to chase crickets. She loved to hear them chirping on the hearth of a winter evening, but Mama was afraid of the damage they might do to the woollens.

"Henrietta, you clear out your own drawers and wardrobe," Mama ordered, "and shake everything. Do it at once!"

"Yes, Mama."

Why did she have to do this extra chore? Mistress Cullen's comforting words had inspired her to try to question John Alex about money-raising without giving her secret away. But now she would not have time. John Alex was to leave on business shortly after breakfast and would not be back until dinner.

"How is my page boy?" John Alex asked, passing her in the hall.

She smiled briefly. "I am at your service, my lord. What is your command?"

"Splendid!" John Alex laughed. "I find it hard to wait for the

first performance. Is Rachel busy with your costume?"

"Yes, she has it cut out in the workroom." She leaned close to whisper. "Please hurry home, John Alex. I have something to ask you." Then, with a wave of his hand, he was gone out the door.

She took the woollen shawls and blouses from the drawer one by one. If there had been a dozen crickets, she would not have seen them, she was too occupied with thoughts. As she laid the clothing on top of the chest, she caught sight of her own sad face in the castle-mirror — and then she looked at the whole mirror itself. The answer was there even though she tried to push it away. It was impossible. How could she sell the castle-mirror that her own beloved John Alex had given her? It was too precious by far, both for itself and for the memory of the giver. She turned quickly to the wardrobe and busied herself shaking out her cloaks and capes. But her gaze returned again and again to the glowing wood and the shining glass. It must be worth a great deal of money, a very great deal, with all the intricate carving on the frame, enough money perhaps to interest young Master Luke and gain Sarah's freedom. She held the mirror close for a moment and closed her eyes. At once, she saw Sarah and heard her voice. *But you said you would not allow it, Henry. You will look after me, will you not?*

Resolutely she took an old shawl from the drawer and wrapped the castle-mirror. At the first opportunity, she would go to the pedlar in the shack next to Master Gibbard, the cabinetmaker, and ask him to buy it from her.

On Saturday, when her small brothers begged Mistress Cullen to take them to the millpond to skate, her chance came.

"I'll go along, too," Henrietta announced, "and pick you up when you fall."

She tucked the mirror under her cloak, thankful that the time had come at last. When she had helped tie the leather thongs on the little wooden skates and had seen the boys safely onto the ice, she turned to Mistress Cullen.

"I'm just going for a little walk," she said. "I shan't be long."

As she went past the sack shed, she peered in. There was no sign of Sarah — only a little mouse keeping warm in his winter hide-away. Had she already gone, or was she being kept at the farm in preparation for going? And yet there was still no other red rib-

bon on the willow tree. Her heart pounded as she passed through the broken gate and the littered field beside Master Gibbard's. She glanced about quickly. Was that a face briefly at the cabinet-maker's window? She knocked timidly upon the pedlar's weather-beaten door. She could hear an angry voice shouting, then footsteps approaching.

The man who opened the door was thin and slightly stooped. Looking startled when he saw her standing on the step, he peered around and behind her, then said in a sly voice, "Good day, miss. What could I do for you, miss?"

"May I come in, please?" Henrietta whispered.

"Indeed, ma'am. Always glad to have the gentry in my home." The man ushered her in with a cunning smile and closed the door. "Now what is so pretty a lady doing in my home?"

"It's about my mirror. I want you to buy it," Henrietta burst out. "I'm sure it's worth a lot of money."

The pedlar took it in his dirty hands and eyed it greedily. "Aye, miss, 'tis a rare beauty, that." He squinted at her. "Looky, miss, where do you come from?"

Henrietta had not intended to tell him, but his face leered close to her own. "My father is Allan Macpherson in the big white house with the green shutters," she stammered.

Hastily the pedlar shoved the mirror back into her hands as if it burned his fingers. "Ah, miss, then I fear I can't have a thing to do with it."

Henrietta was close to tears. "But why not? 'Tis not my papa's mirror but my own. Please do buy it! I won't charge you too much for it."

"Looky, miss, it could get me into a deal of trouble. I can't buy it, and that's that." He started as a woman's voice wailed from the bedroom. "You'll have to pardon me, miss. My good woman's taken with a fever and I must tend her." He grabbed a cup from the table, poured some brown liquid into it from a pot on the hearth and handed it to Henrietta. "Here, miss, have a good cup o' hot tea before you go out into the cold again. And no hard feelin's, miss, eh?"

Her stomach revolted at the dirt and grease that rimmed the cup, but she took two or three sips of the bitter brew. Then she

curtseyed quickly, called out a quavering "thank you, sir," and fled.

Her heart was bursting with disappointment. She was so sure this was the real answer. Surely somewhere there was someone who would like to buy the mirror. But who?

The next three days she was so preoccupied with her problem that she scarcely spoke, even when spoken to. She saw John Alex gazing at her during the evening meals with puzzled alarm. When in the ballroom on the final night of rehearsal for the masque she forgot her line completely and stared blankly into his solemn face, he said, "Is something wrong, little cousin?" She promptly burst into tears and ran from the room. She sensed the astonished looks that followed her and heard her mother's voice.

"Allan, the child must be ill!"

In a moment, Mama, Mistress Cullen and Rachel were standing over her. "Do you have any pain, miss?" Rachel's frown was anxious.

Henrietta sobbed into the quilt, unable to stop. "Go away! Please do all of you go away and leave me alone!"

Mistress Cullen's hand was cool on her forehead. "Mistress, she has a fever. Please leave her to me. I shall look after her."

"I'll fetch cloths wrung out in ice water." Rachel scurried from the room.

"Oh dear! God help us all!" Mama was on the verge of tears herself. "I do hope it's nothing serious. Do one of you fetch her father. I have great fear with all the terrible illnesses going about the country."

"No, no! I'm not ill. It's not that at all. You don't understand!" Henrietta lifted her tear-stained face and tried to leap off the bed. Suddenly the room spun round her, and she heard Mistress Cullen saying, "I have her! Don't fear! I'll lift her in bed and look after her as if she was my own precious darling." Then the firelight went out, and the candle went out, and she knew no more.



Chapter 22

She opened her eyes slowly and the winter sunlight coming in at the window hurt them so that she closed them again. She was too tired at any rate to look at anything. Just to lie under the warm covers and listen to the crackle on the hearth was all she wanted. But was that not John Alex sitting at the foot of the bed? She tried to sit up.

"No, no, little cousin, not yet. 'Tis enough that you have opened your eyes. A little at a time does it for now." John Alex reached out and clasped her hand.

"But I'm in Mama's and Papa's bed!" Her voice sounded to her own ears small and weak. "What am I doing here?"

"You have been very ill, Henry. Mama, Mistress Cullen and Rachel have watched over you by turns. Mama thought it wise to have you close to Rachel's quarters." John Alex stroked her long brown hair. "When you feel strong, I shall brush this for you with



my own hand. 'Tis many a day since it saw a comb."

"How long have I been ill, John Alex?" She was astonished to think she remembered nothing.

"For the better part of a week. The entire village has been as anxious over you as we have. Such a parade of inquiries at the store and at the door!" John Alex smiled. "And despite what your papa thinks, I believe it was the old woman's potion that took your fever away."

"The old woman?" It was all confusing to Henrietta.

"Yes, little cousin. She lives in a shanty up on the limestone ridge beyond the Carscallions. It seems she heard somehow that you were taken with a bad fever, and she came all the way up the river to bring a medicine of herbs for you." John Alex frowned, remembering. "Dr. Chamberlain could do nothing for you. Yet it was only a few hours after I persuaded your mama to let you swallow the herbs that your fever broke and we knew you were mending."

The witch-woman! She had come all the way up the river with her medicine. And it had made her sickness go. But Sarah had

said she was a wise one at healing people. *Sarah!* She struggled to lift her body from the bed. *What had become of Sarah? Almost a week, John Alex had said!*

It was as if he read her thoughts. "Henry, who is Sarah?"

She stared at him, saying nothing.

"Time and time again, in your fever, you spoke of Sarah and called for her. And then, for some inexplicable reason, Mistress Cullen would fly from the room!"

She eyed him warily. "What did I say about her?"

"Nothing that we could make out. There was a good deal of babbling about willow trees and slaves. But then you were very ill. Little wonder you had delirious dreams." He smiled warmly. "Are you not going to tell me who Sarah is? The family says there's no one by that name that you know."

"Not now, John Alex." It was all over. Sarah would be gone to some faraway place never to be seen again, and Henrietta was too weary and listless to weep another tear.

"Henry," John Alex said. "Papa will be asking you why you were at the pedlar's down on the river road. I thought I should warn you."

"Oh?" She struggled to make her mind concentrate on what John Alex was saying. "How did he know?"

"Master Gibbard saw you go there as he was looking out of his window. The pedlar would say nothing except that his wife was ill with a wretched fever. It was there you got it, you know."

"I know." Suddenly she remembered the masque. "Did you have the play, John Alex? Did I miss it all?"

"What kind of friend would I be, making merry while my little cousin was so ill? No, indeed, we have not had the play. We were to have it on the first night on which you opened your eyes. And you are to be carried to the ballroom to see it."

"That will be nice," she said. "Who is to play my part?"

"No one," said John Alex decidedly. "After you, we felt we would be too disappointed in anyone else. We shall cut the part out until we go to Glenora. Perhaps by then you will be able to join us."

She nodded, silent again. It did not matter a great deal. Now that she had lost Sarah, nothing mattered anymore.

"Now I must go and tell the others you have wakened, and the

parade to your bed will begin." His dark serious eyes looked into her own. "Are you sure there is nothing you wish to tell me before they come?"

"No, John Alex. But I am too tired for questions. Please tell Papa."

"Papa will understand." He leaned over and gave her a warm kiss on the cheek. "I shall be back soon, and you get plenty of sleep so that you will be ready for the ballroom tonight."

They all came in, one by one, Mama in tears, Papa trying to keep his dignity but blowing his nose frequently with emotion, Rachel and Mistress Cullen hovering over her with smiles of approval. Donald poked his head sheepishly around the door and called, "Hello, sis. Glad to see you're better!"

Then she fell asleep again, and the only sound in the room was the wood snapping on the fire.

When evening came, John Alex carried her with great care into the ballroom. They had made a high bed for her with pillows and quilts on the couch, her back supported so that she could watch all that was taking place. The guests, who were informed that the performance would be early because of the patient, began to arrive shortly after dinner and were welcomed in the ballroom by Mama and Papa. They all expressed their concern for Henrietta but, warned that too much talk would be tiring, only smiled at her across the room.

At eight o'clock, the performance got under way with a troubadour, Pat Phaney of Clarkville, singing a light-hearted ballad recounting the events of the masque as they would unfold. Then the action began. Despite her weakness and sorrow, Henrietta found herself smiling at the mocking gestures and the wild waving of banners. The costumes themselves, though stitched with a hasty hand, were brilliant with crimsons, golds and blues, filling the room like a flag. Suddenly, in the midst of a speech by Tom Ramsay, there was a loud knock on the ballroom door. Everyone looked startled, most of all the players. Tom tried to go on, but when the knocking persisted, he shrugged his shoulders apologetically and ran to open the door.

Rachel stood there, a picture of distress. "Please, sir, may I speak to the master?"

Master Macpherson rose. "Rachel, what brings you to interrupt

the play? Surely nothing can be this important at such a time?"

"Master, it's Adam. He's fetched someone in from outside, sir, and we don't know what to do with her."

Master Macpherson stared. "Someone? Who is it?"

"The dear goodness knows, sir. Adam found her prowling around the house as he went to see about the horse, sir, and he says she's from down the river. He found her peeking in at all the windows, and she won't say why."

"Bring her here at once!" Master Macpherson said.

Silence fell over the company. Henrietta kept her eyes on the door. Rachel was back in a moment. Adam followed, his old arms finding it difficult to hold the young person in his grasp.

"Here she is, sir. I think it's that wild one that was stayin' down the river, sir. I don't know what to make of it!"

"Sarah!" Henrietta's cry sounded before Sarah was in the room.

"Oh, Henry, I come to say good-bye! They'll be here for me tomorrow, and I'm to go away, and I'll never be back. Never! I meant no harm — truly I didn't! I tied the other red ribbon to Willow Castle, but I never did hear from you. I'll be going now and not be troubling you again. Please tell your papa to let me go. Please!"

"Henrietta, can you tell me what this all about?" Papa glowered above her. "Has something been taking place without my knowledge?"

John Alex came to stand by Henrietta's makeshift bed. "I think now is not the time for bluster, Allan, nor for anger. There is more here than we can discover in a moment, and more than we wish to probe with all the guests present." He went to Sarah and took her hand. "This poor child is frozen. Why not let her sit beside the kitchen hearth and give her food and drink? Then perhaps later we can piece the story together, when we are alone."

"Where is Mistress Cullen?" roared Papa.

"Gone to her room as usual, master," Rachel said. "Shall I fetch her?"

"At once! She can deal with this child if anyone can." Papa waited, drumming his fingers on a nearby table.

They all watched the door. Henrietta heard Mistress Cullen's soft footsteps even before she stood on the threshold, but she was totally unprepared for what followed.

Mistress Cullen came in slowly and curtseyed before Master Macpherson. Then, at Master Macpherson's gesture, she turned toward Sarah. The look on her face changed in one moment from stunned disbelief to such rapture that not a breath stirred in the room. Slowly, as if in a kind of dream, she moved to the child and folded her in her arms. "Arrah! God in Heaven it is who sent you to me! I knew it all the while I would find you. Sarah, my own wee colleen!"

For a long moment, the hush in the room was unbroken. Then John Alex quietly touched her arm.

"This child is yours, ma'am?"

"She is my Sarah! Look at us! Can you doubt it?"

Henrietta stared at them, unable to understand how she could not have seen the resemblance herself. The same waxen pale skin, the same black hair, the same eyes, even the same oval shape to the thin face! But then she had never seen them together, and Sarah had said her mother had died of the cholera.

The story came out in bits and pieces at the hearthside. Mistress Cullen had lost her husband Liam from the cholera on the ocean voyage. She herself, released from temporary hospital quarters, weakened but cured of the disease, found no one with a clue to her daughter's whereabouts. Roaming from settlement to settlement, she had hoped to catch a glimpse of her in the midst of some settler's family.

"She has been living on the outskirts of Napanee for some time," John Alex said. "Why did you not inquire after her?"

"Because I had a great fear that the family who had her would not want to give her up." Mistress Cullen held Sarah close. "If I should have found her, I was planning to steal her away by night if need be. For this reason, I never spoke to anyone of my loss, not even at the Hawkins farm. I spoke only of my longing for the green hills of Ireland and my own childhood there."

It was Henrietta's turn to tell all. When she came to the part about selling her mirror to pay young Master Luke for Sarah, her father blew his nose so furiously that the rest could scarcely hear her words.

"Papa, I thought if people were bought and sold in Upper Canada, I could pay Master Luke for Sarah, and she would be free to go where she pleased."

Papa sat on a chair beside her. "And how could you know, my lass, that no one's freedom may be bought or sold any longer in the British possessions? There was a law passed against slavery in any form, child, as long ago as August."

"But Master Lowe still has Joe, Papa."

Master Lowe came to her and bowed. "Madam, mine is the only home old Joe has ever known, and he prefers to live out his life with my family rather than be cast out on his own. But from now on, he is my employee and must be paid a wage. There is the difference."

Henrietta lay silent. To think Joe was a real slave no longer, and she did not know a thing about it!

John Alex's eyes twinkled. "Allan, we need someone to take the place of an ailing page boy in our masque. It seems to me we have a little Irish colleen here who could do credit to the part with a prompt or two."

"Indeed, yes!" Papa rose. "Adam!" he shouted. "Go at once and fetch young Luke Carscallion and all his family. There is much to explain here and much to forgive on both sides of the fence. Rachel, prepare a feast for us after the masque. Young Luke shall break bread with us, and let him dare to say that good Tory bread cannot satisfy a Reformer's stomach!"

There was a shout of laughter and a great hubbub following. John Alex came toward Sarah and gently took her hand. He placed it in Henrietta's. "Now there is nothing can come between you," he said, "but the secret days in Willow Castle will be no more. You shall both have to make a new beginning."

The Secret of Willow Castle



Chapter 23

Henrietta stood on the branch as silent and still as the dancing china shepherdesses on the morning room table. If she moved even a leaf, it might not come again. Suddenly, swooping wings splashed the yellow-green foliage of the tree with scarlet.

"He has come back, Papa! He has! I saw him! The tanager has come back!" She slithered down the huge trunk, long green skirt catching at the twigs and branches. The bird, with a startled cry, flew to a stump on the limestone ridge. "Papa, did you hear me? It was the tanager after all!"

"Did I not tell you he would return to find his friends?" Papa stood smiling at the mill door, the roar of the falls almost drowning his voice.

"Yes, but I didn't really believe it, Papa. Where has he been?"

"Wintering in the warmth of a southern land, most likely, lass, but now he's come home. See that you don't frighten him with too great a show of eagerness. He'll come to you in time." Papa disappeared in the dark interior of the mill.

Papa was right as always. There was really now no need for haste. Sarah would be coming soon, and they could, if they wished, have the sunny day together in Willow Castle, swaying from Sir John Alexander's Tower with the hedgerows and pastures of the whole world at their feet. And yet even with the coming of spring and every leaf in place on the willow, she knew adventures there would never be the same again. With no more need for secrecy, a certain sweetness and poignancy had gone from the day. The little friend who would soon come and shout for joy at the return of the tanager would be the same, but gone would be the bare feet and the black banner of hair streaming in the wind, the ragged skirt and shawl and the small wan face whose dark eyes gazed so trustfully into her own. For a brief intense moment, Henrietta longed to have her back, the other Sarah, whispering confidences among the branches, sharing warmth in the sack shed, swinging barefoot through the hickory bush, creeping over the rocks and through the cave to the witch-woman's shanty. But that Sarah would never come again. How wise John Alex had been.

She could see his warm affectionate smile and hear his solemn voice on the night of the masque. *The secret days in Willow Castle will be no more. You shall both have to make a new beginning.*

And now John Alex himself had made a new beginning, leaving Uncle Lowther at Hallowell to move into Kingston to set up his own law practice. Papa had proudly shown them the advertisement in the Kingston Chronicle and Gazette:

JOHN A. MACDONALD, ATTORNEY, &C, HAS OPENED HIS OFFICE IN THE BRICK BUILDING BELONGING TO MR. COLLAR, OPPOSITE THE SHOP OF D. PRENTISS, ESQ., QUARRY STREET, WHERE HE WILL ATTEND TO ALL THE DUTIES OF THE PROFESSION.

“Papa, will John Alex ever come back again?” she had asked sadly, as the months slipped by without him.

“Perhaps,” Papa said, “but he has a great deal of work to do in the world when he ripens a little.”

“Ripens, Papa?”

“Grows older and wiser, lass,” Papa said. “He will, with the coming of years.”

Idly watching a willow leaf drift to the brink of the falls, she remembered Adam’s words: *We be lucky, miss, if there is no big changes to shake our lives.* And yet there were always changes, she knew that now. If Master Edward Hawkins was gone from Napanee forever, a young Scotsman from Ballychroan in the Highlands had taken his farm and taken, too, as his wife, the lonely Irishwoman who had searched for a lost child and found her.

“Miss Hen, is that you?”

Startled, Henrietta looked up from her place in the sun on the log. “Becky! I didn’t expect to see you here!”

Becky came up the hill through the buttercups and Queen Anne’s lace. “Peter was coming to have some grist ground,” she said, “and I came along with him. I have something to tell you.”

Henrietta made room for her. “What is it, Beck?”

“Miss, we’re to have a child of our own in the autumn!” Becky’s rosy face glowed.

“A child of your own!” The pang of jealousy that swept over

Henrietta was gone in an instant. "Oh, Becky, how happy I am for you!"

"I just wanted you to know, miss, if it's a girl I shall name her Henrietta, after you."

"Becky, you are a dear girl!" Henrietta longed to throw her arms around her as in the old days, but she was twelve years old now and a young lady. She reached over and clasped Becky's hand. "I love you, Beck, and I always shall."

"Miss, is that someone calling to you?" Becky was looking toward the river trail to the north. "I do believe it's your little friend!"

"Yes, Beck, I knew she was coming. I've been waiting for her all the morning."

Becky rose. "I must go now, miss. You'll come and have a visit with us soon, won't you?"

"Yes, dear Becky, I shall, and thank you for sharing your news with me."

Henrietta watched Becky, her red gingham frock rustling the grasses, meet her Peter at the mill door. Then, with a whirl of her own skirts, she was once again in the green world of Willow Castle. She listened, in the stillness, to the reedy piping of the tanager. In the warm radiance of the spring sunshine, seated close to Alistair in the farm cart, Sarah was coming to her down the mill road.

Allan Macpherson House and Park

In the town of Napanee, Ontario, Henrietta's home stands now, as it did in 1834, on the riverbank looking toward the falls. The mills are gone, but a plaque in a hillside park marks their place, and the willows still trail their branches in the quiet waters of the pond.

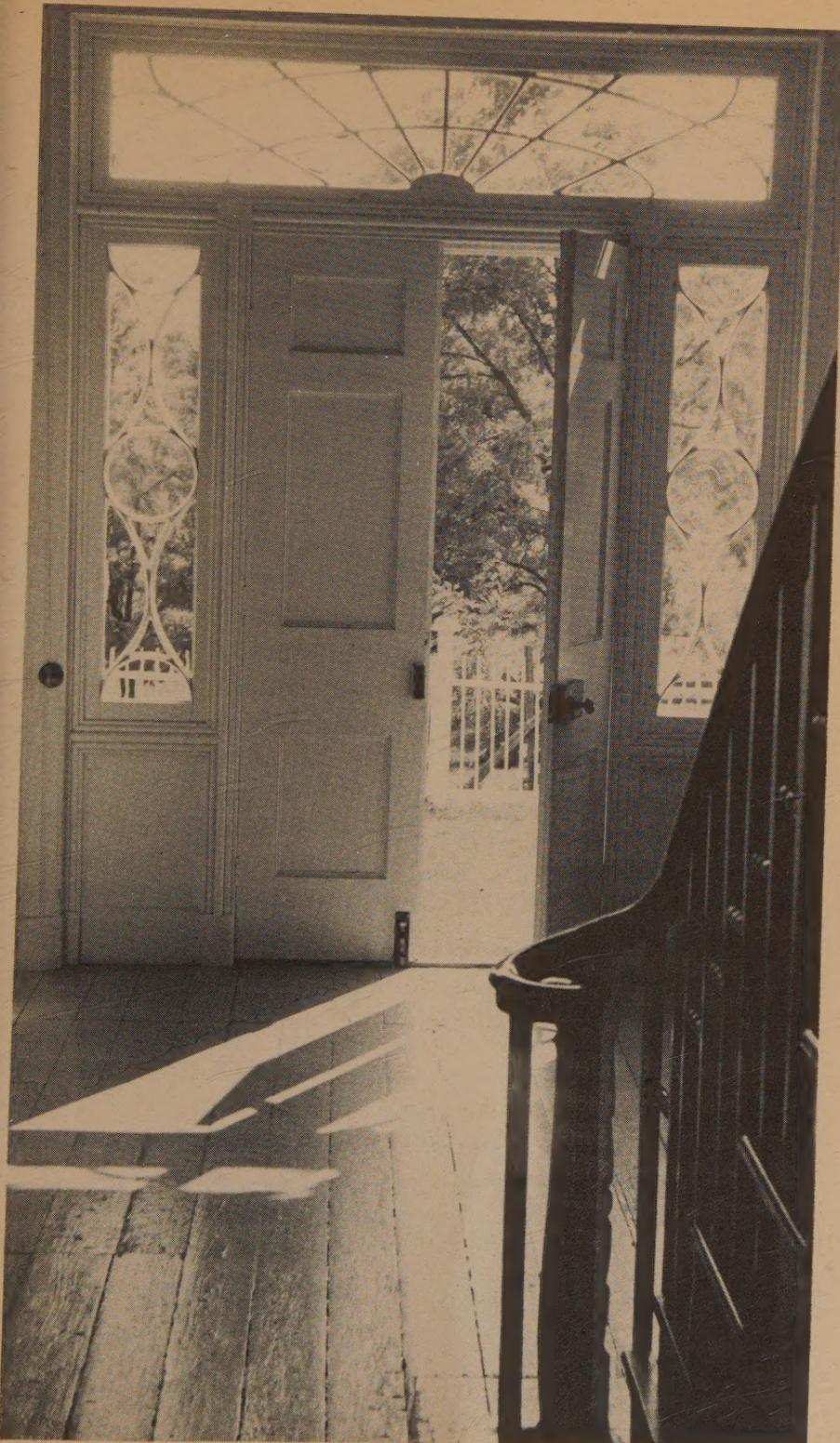
As Papa had promised, Henrietta's favourite cousin, John Alex, did "rise in the world." He rose to become Sir John Alexander Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada.

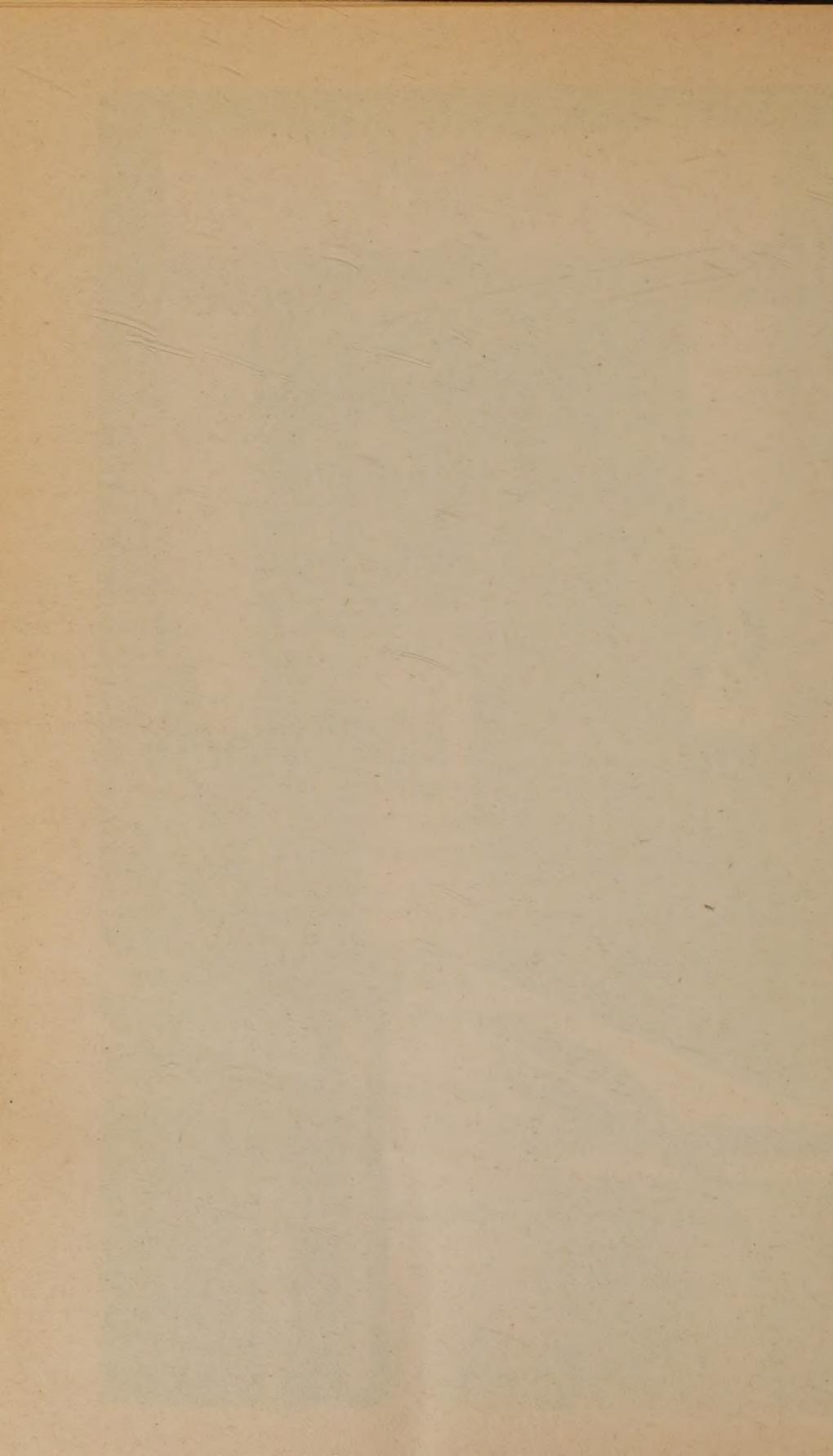
Allan Macpherson House and Park

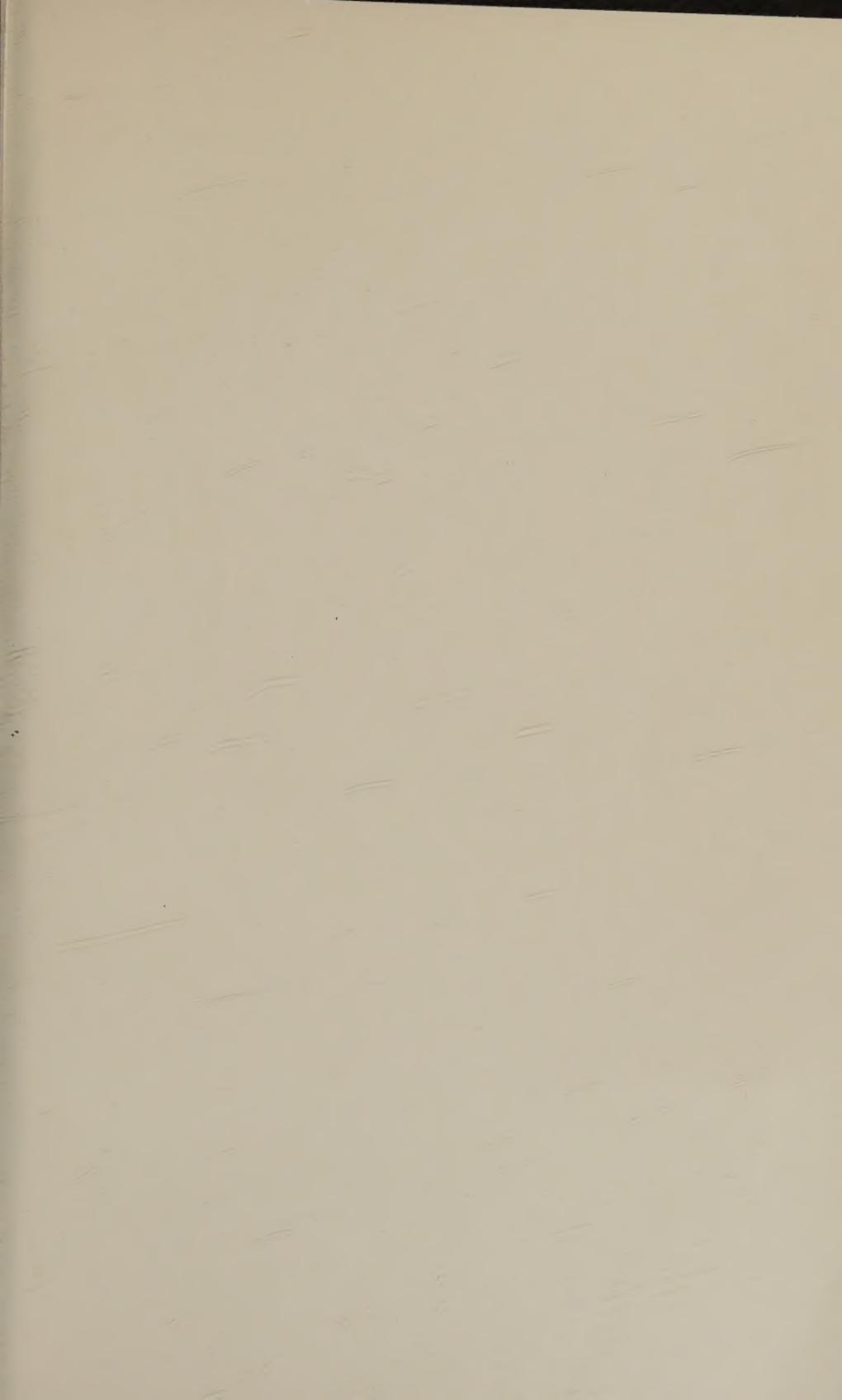
Box 183, Napanee, Ontario, Canada K7R 3M3

Telephone 613-354-5982

Group tours and school programmes may be arranged by appointment.









The Secret of Willow Castle

A Canadian chestnut brought back into print for a new generation of young readers, this is the story of Henrietta (Henry) Macpherson, an 11-year-old tomboy and slightly rebellious daughter of a prosperous gristmill owner, Justice of the Peace and Crown Land agent in an early-19th-century Canadian village.

Set against an accurate historical backdrop, the story weaves together the lives of Henrietta, cousin John Alex — later to become Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald — and an orphaned servant child named Sarah. High adventure paces the story throughout, from the discovery of the secret desk compartment, through the first glimpse of the strange dark-haired girl and on to clandestine meetings in the giant old willow tree.

The Secret of Willow Castle is a delightful read as well as a memorable look at Canadian life in 1834 through the eyes of children with whom modern-day readers can easily identify.

"Lyn Cook has created another Anne of Green Gables in a warm and appealing Canadian story set in the pioneer days of Upper Canada. . . ."

— THE LONDON FREE PRESS